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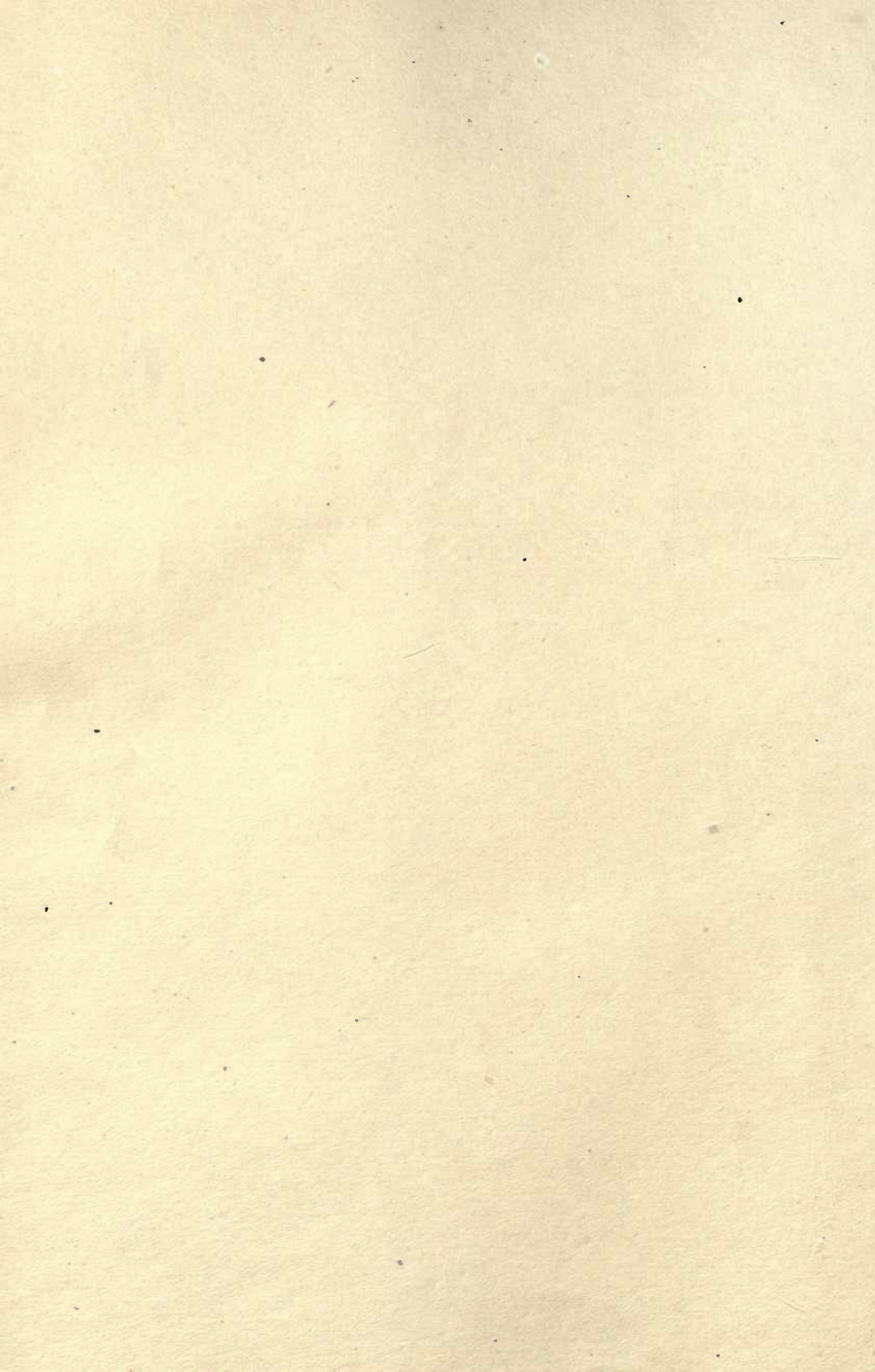




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CHARLES ST JOHN
NOTE BOOKS



CHARLES ST JOHN'S
NOTE BOOKS

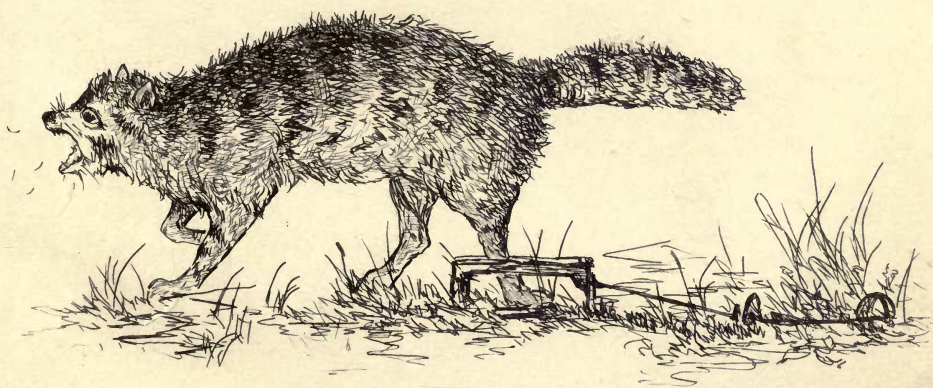


CHARLES ST JOHN'S NOTE BOOKS

1846-1853

INVERERNE, NAIRN, ELGIN

EDITED BY ADMIRAL H. C. ST JOHN



EDINBURGH: DAVID DOUGLAS, 10 CASTLE STREET

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PREFACE.

ON my return from the East, I found amongst other notes and rough sketches of my father's his daily journal, which he kept with accuracy when living at Invererne (near Forres). Submitting it to my friend Mr David Douglas, the compiler and editor of "Natural History and Sport in Moray," published in 1863, and reissued with additions in 1882, now entirely out of print, he thought that although most of the facts had been recorded in that volume, yet the daily record of the author's observations at Invererne was so fresh that he ventured to think they would be interesting to all lovers of Natural History.

I have introduced some of the rough sketches made for the amusement and instruction of his children. These are taken at random from his sketch books. On the fly leaves of the volume will be found those for our amusement.

The "Memoir" by Cosmo Innes and "Life at Rosehall," which both appear in "Natural History and Sport in Moray," are added; also a few remarks of my own on visiting the locality in 1900.

STOKEFIELD, THORNBURY.



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FOR

DAVID DOUGLAS

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FULL PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.

* CORMORANT,	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
WILD CAT,	<i>Vignette of, on Title-page.</i>
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INVERERNE.

INTRODUCTION.

I.

MORAY REVISITED.

AFTER such a long absence it was most interesting to visit old haunts and localities in Morayshire. From the railway station at Forres a path leads across the field to the river Findhorn—distant about three-quarters of a mile. Here I found the Ferry still worked with a flat-bottomed boat (a coble in Scotland) pulled from bank to bank by a wire stretched over the water. The ferryman's hut was, I verily believe, the same log cabin. How often I have called the boatman from his quiet siesta on a warm sunny afternoon. Here the river is exactly as it used to be. Its rich brown clear water gives the sides and silvery underneath parts of the fresh running salmon a tinge of brown when he turns from a rise. Following the river down a mile or so to its mouth it was difficult to realise that so many years had passed since I used so often to do so. The pools were

unaltered. The piles and timber used to strengthen the east bank from the floods might be the same as far as their appearance went.

The pleasure in visiting these well-remembered scenes was greatly increased by the interest my youngest daughter, who accompanied me, took in the river, the birds, and my relating boyish adventures at certain spots. We found a common sand-piper's nest with five eggs close to the river, where any ordinary flood would have washed it away.

As we walked along the raised embankment, redshanks and peewits kept flying close to our heads, uttering anxious notes of warning to their young. The cornfields, where wild geese were formerly so fond of feeding, are now divided by wire instead of stone walls—a gain, no doubt, in surface cultivation.

The bank all round the bay, protecting the land from being inundated at very high tides, is exactly as it used to be. It runs up to the Forres Burn and follows its bank some distance towards the town.

“Invererne” remains intact. The same iron gates at the beginning of the long entrance drive still do duty. The garden has many of the old fruit-trees in it, which might be replaced to advantage. The farm buildings, with its “Doo” cot, seem in as good condition as of old.

The number of birds, waders and others, that were enjoying themselves round the low grassy sward between the sea wall and the water spoke well for the consideration and protection they must enjoy.

Nairn and its immediate neighbourhood has changed more than any of its adjacent towns. Elgin has certainly increased, but the country all round remains as of old.

Scotch farming in those days was so forward and good, little improvement could be expected. The substitution of wire for wall fencing was the only difference that struck me. Whisky distilleries are far more numerous, springing up from heather-covered spots where grouse and other game used to be common. The streams by which these numerous (I presume successful)

money-making affairs are always located receive their poisonous refuse, which forms a slimy deposit on the stones and rocks, very much to the detriment of trout or salmon, particularly the young fry.

In May 1851 I was at the Loch of Spynie with my father and Mr John Hancock looking for the shoveller's nest; and having watched one of these birds alight in the long grass bordering the open water, we approached quietly and the duck flushed close to us. The nest with several eggs was in some long grass. At the time I speak of, this bird was not common in the locality, and its really nesting was not certain. Great was Mr Hancock's pleasure at procuring an authentic specimen of the egg.

In 1897 I was once more close to the same spot, and the above incident was brought vividly to my recollection. Scarcely 100 yards had I gone down the big drain which runs through the great extent of swamp and into the open water, when I came on a couple of drake shovellers, and a short way on a duck and seven little shovellers. A hundred yards further, another brood of about five, with their mother, swam out of the tall rushes into the open water.

I visited the rocks below Gordonstown and found the peregrine falcon was still there. It was here we used to get the young birds to train for hawking. Although the Lossie is practically ruined for trout fishing owing to the number of mills which now adorn its banks, nearly all discharging refuse matter into the small river, and being quite unequal to carry it away, its bed for miles is slimy with filth, poisonous to fish. As the tide comes up sea trout come with it, and can be taken with the fly just above the fishing village of Lossiemouth. Possibly during a heavy flood some may go up the river and get past the mills, which are mainly close to Elgin.

When returning south by Loch Ness it was wonderful to see the tameness of the black-headed gulls that followed the steamer, almost taking the bread from my hand, which I held out over the vessel's side. They approached in numbers within two and three

feet. This tameness deserted them on leaving the loch, when the birds only followed in our wake.

I stopped a night at the Fall of Foyers, which, as far as the amount of water that comes over the rock and used to give the interest and name to the locality, is now a misnomer. Enough to fill a jug certainly trickles down, but the beautiful falls no longer exist.

How lovely the scenery down the loch is. The big Mountain Mealfourvie on the west side, on which I have seen and shot many a fine stag, has a peculiar charm, with its purple side, bare rocks, and lower portions sprinkled with birch and Scotch fir. This mountain is a sure find for deer amongst the Glen Urquhart Forests.

I have visited most of the world since I lived at Aldourie, on the bank of this Scotch lake, and have seen little to beat its beauty, much on a grander scale, but not otherwise.

II.

SALMON FISHING.

THE number of salmon nets and boats I saw between the ferry on the Findhorn and the mouth of the river brought vividly to my mind the following remarks made by my father in 1846 :—

“There is no doubt that salmon are decreasing yearly in most of the northern rivers. With blind eagerness these fish are hunted down, trapped and caught in every possible way ; and in consequence of this reckless destruction, proprietors of most salmon rivers will, before many years have elapsed, lose the high rents which they now derive from letting the right of fishing to sportsmen and speculators. It is perfectly reasonable to suppose that, like other animals, fish must of necessity decrease unless allowed fairplay and time to breed. It is not the rod fisher who thins their number to any injurious extent ; nor, indeed, do I think river fishing to any fair extent

can exterminate a fish whose progeny is so numerous ; but what, without doubt, ought to be restricted and better regulated is the system of stake and bag net fishing. The salmon never reach their breeding ground at all. The mouths of every river are flanked by stake nets and other dangers. The poor salmon have not the slightest chance. Coasting along the shore, on approaching the fresh water they find a fence which they cannot get through by any means, and which leads them direct into an iniquitous puzzle or trap. If the object of proprietors and lessees of rivers was to exterminate salmon, they could not devise better means to do so than they now practise. Exorbitant and increasing rents necessarily oblige the lessees to use every means in their power to catch sufficient fish to pay their expenses and acquire a surplus. The man who rents a salmon river as a matter of trade and speculation cannot be expected to do otherwise than make the best of his time. He pays a high rent for the right of dragging a net through a certain part of the river ; he pays a rent for the right of putting up stake and bag nets ; he pays numerous servants, and has also the great expense of making and renewing his boats, nets, and other valuable tackle ; and, after all, is generally blamed as the destroyer of the salmon, whereas the real enemy is the proprietor who lets the right of fishing, with no more restriction than the common law gives against fishing out of season, etc. At the same time, it must be remembered that one single proprietor can do little towards improving this system unless joined and aided by his neighbours for a considerable distance along the same line of coast.

“ A few years without any wholesale destruction of salmon would bring back this fish to something like their former number, and enable proprietors to ask and obtain the same rents that they now do from English and other sportsmen who come northwards for angling. As it now is, angling in many salmon rivers (formerly plentifully supplied) is a mere joke.

“ Excepting during the run of grilse, angling in many rivers is next to useless ; and this can only be well remedied by a system

of unanimous and general preserving the fish from being so recklessly destroyed by the net.

"I do not pretend to give a guide book list and account of all the rivers, streams, and lakes where the angler may find employment. Their name is legion, and it would require more time and more knowledge of the Highlands than I possess.

"There are few districts, however, from Ayrshire to Caithness where trout and salmon do not abound. Many excellent streams run into the Solway Firth, and many good lakes are in that district abounding in trout; but mines and other works are beginning to fill much of that country with a population most destructive to game and fish. The Tweed and its tributaries are known to all, and have been so often described by abler pens than mine, that I say nothing of them. Then comes the lakes and streams of Argyleshire, beautifully situated in a wild, rugged country, abounding with Cockneys and summer tourists, who torment the waters and trout to the most unmitigated extent. Loch Awe will, however, always hold a high name for the large lake trout, rivalling the pike in size and voracity, but far stronger and more difficult to catch. When fairly hooked, too, a *salmo ferox* of 20 lb. weight will nearly tow a small fishing coble after him during his first rush, on finding himself fast and firm on the line.

"Inverness-shire and the west of Ross-shire and Sutherland are intersected everywhere by excellent salmon rivers and lakes full to overflowing of trout and pike. It is a fallacy* to suppose that pike are detrimental to the sport of the fly fisher, that is, in a Highland lake where there is depth and space enough for both kinds of fish to live and flourish. Of course, pike kill thousands and tens of thousands of small trout, but the fault of most Highland lakes is that there are too many trout in them, and the fly fisher works for a month without killing a trout above a pound weight. Pike keep down this overstock. There are still plenty and more than plenty of trout remaining in the water, and of a better size and quality than where they are not thinned. I have

* [A somewhat dangerous statement to make, as the circumstances of different localities are so different.—ED.]

invariably found this the case, and that I could take a greater weight of trout in a loch where there are pike than where the trout had no natural enemies to keep down their daily increasing numbers. Besides which, though the pike is piscivorous, he is also most decidedly as omnivorous as a pig or an alderman. A great part of the food of a pike consists of frogs, leeches, weeds, &c. Young wild ducks, water hens, coots and even water rats do not come amiss to him. Like the shark, the pike when hungry swallows anything and everything that has the misfortune to come within reach of his murderous jaws.

"If the fact could be ascertained, I would back a *salmo ferox* of 10 lb. weight to kill more trout in a week than a pike of the same weight would in a month. I never killed a large trout without finding the remains of other trout within him, sometimes, too, a size that must have cost him some trouble to swallow. In fact, I am strongly of opinion that pike should be encouraged in all large Highland lakes where the trout are numerous and small. There is no doubt, too, that the large trout, with a due respect to the Lextalionis, feed on the infant pike as freely as the pike feed on the young trout.

"There are numberless fine lakes in the interior of the Northern Counties situated in wild and sequestered spots remote from roads and tracks, the waters of which the line of the angler seldom disturbs; but all are full of trout, and in many are great numbers of that excellent fish the char. This fish, however, very seldom takes the fly, and its presence in a lake is only known by his autumnal migration from the depths of the water to the shallow parts along the shore. During the month of October these migrations of the char generally take place, and they may then be caught in great numbers by nets. In most lakes they never take a bait.

"On the north and east of Sutherland there are some excellent salmon rivers. Amongst the best, if not quite the best, is the Shin, which flows from the loch of that name.

"In some parts of this county the ascending propensities of the salmon are most strikingly shown by the determination with

which they pass from river to lake, from lake to burn, and so gradually ascending the waters till they reach streams at last so small and shallow that the looker on wonders only how two salmon can pass in them. Taking advantage of floods and rising of the burns, they work themselves up shallows and narrow places where frequently there is scarcely water enough for the smallest trout to swim in. Having fulfilled their object of spawning, they drop back during the winter floods to the larger streams and thence to the sea, where they soon become reinvigorated and increase in size with the most incredible rapidity.

“On the Ross coast between Sutherland and Inverness-shire there are few streams run into the Eastern Sea. The Beauly is a noble stream and abounding in magnificent scenery.

“*On revient toujours*, etc., and above all rivers the Findhorn, in my estimation, holds the highest place, not only for its fishing qualities, but for the varied country and beautiful scenery through which it passes, from the dreary heights of the Monaghleahd Mountains, where it rises to the flat and fertile plains of Morayshire, where it empties itself into the salt water. The scenery and beauty of the Findhorn for several miles is not equalled in Scotland.

“I do not know that the Findhorn can be called a first-rate angling river, for it is too variable and subject to floods and changes as to depth of water, and though these sudden and unexpected risings of the river add to its interest in the eyes of a looker-on, they militate sadly against the success of the angler, who has to gather up his tackle and run for his life, or who, having made up his mind to a week's good fishing, finds the river either of a deep black or of the colour of pea-soup, and constantly overflowing bank and brae, brought down by some sudden rainstorm which has fallen on the distant mountains of the Monaghleahd.

“The Spey is another glorious river, a finer river, indeed, for salmon than the Findhorn. Indeed, the rent paid for the salmon fishing at the mouth of the river proves it to be the best supplied

with fish in Scotland. Everything in this matter-of-fact age brings its real marketable value, and by a simple rule of arithmetic the number of fish which inhabit each river may almost be ascertained, as the rent is, of course, proportioned exactly to the number of salmon which can be caught.

“The Spey is a fine wide stream too, with a great volume of water, and, though subject like all Highland rivers to floods, is not liable to such sudden and dangerous risings as its neighbour the Findhorn.”

What would he think of the present system of netting, not only at the mouths of the rivers (where the stake nets were set in his day), but along the entire coast line? The stake nets now in use are of far superior construction to those then in vogue. The present ones have frequently attached from the outer end, where the trap is, a floating wall of netting, with another trap at its extremity. The net which principally marks the improvement in salmon catching is the bag net. This consists of a wall 90 yards long and 20 feet deep of 2-inch mesh.

The land end is usually attached to a rock. Where no rock is available, a small anchor or other fastening. At the end of the 90 yards the bag or trap is fixed, again another length of wall 90 yards long with its trap; not unfrequently this is repeated a third time, reaching collectively 300 yards from the coast. Sometimes only one trap is used, and this may be at the end of three lengths of wall. As the whole apparatus floats, it can be set in any depth of water, and an anchor or two is all that is required to keep the sides of the trap extended.

These nets are set usually about 200 or 300 yards apart, but the distance varies, depending on the formation of the coast. I have seen them within a stone's throw of each other.

It may truly be said that the whole coast line for hundreds of miles is studded with these nets, and how the unfortunate fish reach the rivers is difficult to understand. If they succeed in doing so, they are met with the seine; boats with nets are kept at the head of the pools; a watchman is placed at the tail, where

the fish can be seen as they pass up over the shallows. On his giving the signal that a salmon has ascended, the seine is shot out, and a hundred to one the fish is caught.

The upper waters suffer from poaching, which is carried on to a greater extent than is generally known. Unfortunately this nefarious trade is worked also during the spawning season, when the fish are easily destroyed, but unfit for food.

The thirty-six hours' close time does not apply fairly to all rivers. For instance, when the netting is allowed for long distances from the mouth of the river, the thirty-six hours' close time is insufficient for the fish to reach the open water. The close time, therefore, should be a receding one; giving the first six miles the first thirty-six hours, the second thirty-six hours would then reach the twelfth mile, and so on. By this plan running fish would probably be able to pass up.

One Saturday afternoon I arranged with the man in charge of five nets to go out with him when he examined the bag for salmon. When I reached his station I found him very dubious whether he would go at all. "Why not?" I asked him. "There is too much wind, and I am thinking there'll be a bit of a sea on." "Won't you be fined?" I said. "I'm no' thinking so." "Then I understand if you cannot take the wall off for the close time from to-night till Monday on account of the weather being too rough you won't be fined?" "That's so," he answered. The point—rather a fine one—whether the weather was sufficiently rough to make it impossible to lift the net was left to this man. No overseer's or inspector's opinion was available or necessary. This way of working these nets along a stretch of coast where hundreds of nets are set is certainly not conducive to the increase of salmon.

I met at Aberdeen an intelligent fish-dealer who had very decided opinions on the scarcity of salmon, the steady decrease of which he attributed to two causes. First, the enormous number of bag nets; and secondly, the wholesale poaching, particularly during the spawning time. The quantity of fish he was offered and declined during this season appeared extraordinary.

"Are the upper waters watched?" I asked. "Oh, yes!" he said, "but not thoroughly."

In Ireland poaching is carried on at all seasons and all times with nets of various sorts, also by poisoning in a wholesale way by spurge or lime. The fish so destroyed find a ready market in Manchester. By the uninitiated the effect of the poison is not easily detected for a couple of days, the appearance of the fish being practically unchanged, but if the finger is pressed on the side the dent remains. It is a mooted point whether these fish are wholesome or not as articles of food.

Trammel netting and small bag nets from the rocky points is the usual mode of poaching on the west coast.

It seems strange that notwithstanding the numerous Commissions that have been started, and the number of scientific men who have carefully considered this most serious subject (*i.e.*, the continual falling off in the number of salmon), that practically nothing has been done. The difficulty can be solved by fairplay for the fish. How best to secure this is a knotty point where so many interests are concerned. If the upper and lower proprietors would combine, the first step to improvement would be started. Poaching might be checked by overseers (taking care they are reliable) and heavier fines. Poisoning fish ought to be made a criminal offence.

I have heard it frequently said, and have also seen it in print, that salmon never take any food during the time they remain in fresh water. Doubtless it has happened to many, as it has to myself, that being anxious to procure a salmon, and having tried almost every fly in your book, without even moving a fish, worm has been resorted to, and baiting not with a single worm, but with three or four large ones, success has followed. The worm is not bolted suddenly and greedily, but very slowly. I have myself given a fish five or ten minutes to do so, being careful not to tighten the line during the process, and wondering at the moment whether enjoyment at having found such a pleasant mouthful of real food was the cause of this deliberation. The shrimp also is very sure bait.

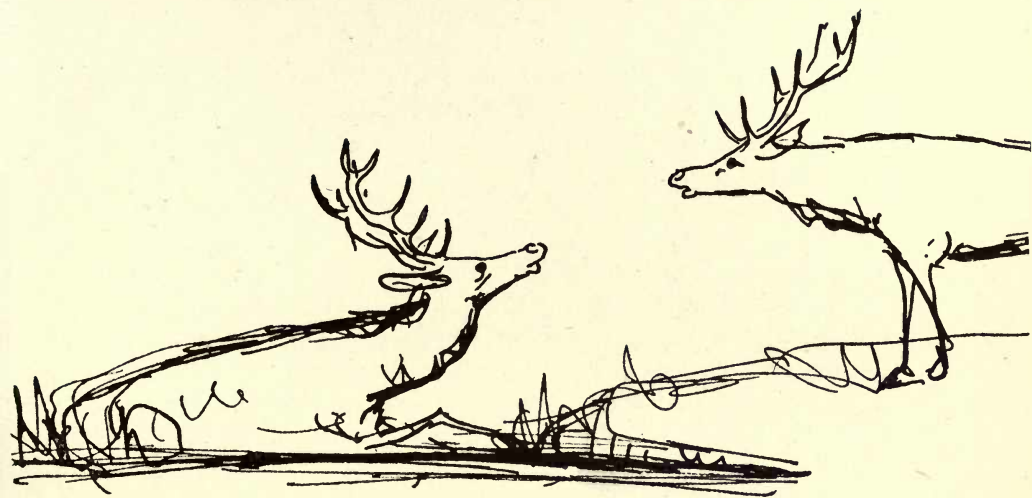
A keen fisherman told me a curious incident which happened to himself. He was using a fly with a double hook, which a salmon of 9 lbs. took. The fish made a short quick rush, and then came straight in like a log of wood, and was pulled out on the gravel just alive and no more. The hook had one barb in the upper jaw and the other barb in the lower, the mouth being closed so tightly that the fish was simply drowned. Within the mouth and gills was a whole fresh trout 4 in. long, half another, very much decomposed, and several worms. All this food had been stopped in the act of being cast out, a circumstance, I believe, that usually, if not always, takes place on a fish being hooked, suddenly seized, and possibly when very much startled.

The above circumstances would satisfy most people that food is taken by salmon when in fresh water. Why they take the artificial fly, except mistaking it for a shrimp, I cannot say. The minnow is a good representative of a trout or a fly. The colley,* which is very much used in Ireland by poachers as well as legitimate fishermen, is very deadly.

I may here refer to a river I visited in Yesso, the northern island of the Japanese group, where the lower three miles was fished to a scale unknown in England. The time for netting opened the third week in August and closed the second week in October, during which time—about seven weeks—the average season's catch of salmon was 6000 tons. No outside or coast fishing existed. The fish were left free, and had time to reproduce their species without further persecution.

* "Colley," local name for a loach.





MEMOIR.

CHARLES ST JOHN, or, to speak accurately, Charles William George St John, the author of "Wild Sports of the Highlands," and of these observations and notes of natural history, was the son of General the Hon. Frederick St John, who was the second son of Frederick, second Viscount Bolingbroke. Charles was born 3rd December 1809. The first account I have of him is from his schoolfellow and dear friend, a frequent companion in his after years, and a fellow-student of nature as well as fellow-sportsman. Mr Thomas Jeans writes to me:—

"My friendship with Charles St John began about the year 1821, when he was first sent to school at Midhurst, in Sussex, when Dr Bayly was head-master. He might then have been about eleven years of age. I remember perfectly his first appearance as a 'new boy'—handsome, fair-haired, quiet, and gentleman-like. I can see him now, standing near the ponderous 'iron door' which had just been shut upon him by the porter, and which separated us from the outer world. My happening to know a relative of his was our first bond of union, and the similarity of our tastes cemented it. We became friends at once, and worked our way up together in the school. Though I was his senior by a

year or two, he was far ahead of me in all the theory and some of the practice of 'wild sports.' But it was under the tuition of a certain old pensioner, who, in virtue of his weekly function in the school, went by the name of the drill-sergeant, that we both attained to no mean proficiency in spinning for trout and trolling for pike in the river Arun whenever we could shirk out of bounds on half-holidays, as well as in setting night-lines artistically for eels.

"Even at that time St John had the zoological bump largely developed. His box (or *scobb*, as we used to call it, after the Winchester fashion) was generally a sort of menagerie—dormice in the one till, stag-beetles of gigantic size and wonderful caterpillars in paper boxes in the other, while sometimes a rabbit, sometimes a guinea-pig, or perhaps a squirrel, was lodged below in a cell cunningly constructed of the Delphin classics and Ainsworth's Dictionary. He was scarcely without live-stock of some sort.

"I think he must have left Midhurst after remaining there about four years, and then I lost sight of him for a time. In 1828 (I think) I found him appointed to a clerkship in the Treasury, junior to an old schoolfellow of ours, Edward Ricketts, who, years afterwards, married a sister of Mrs St John's." Mr Jeans speaks of his life at this time as "somewhat fast: his connections gave him the *entrée* everywhere (his aunt, Lady Sefton, was then a great leader), and the result was his giving the Treasury, as he used himself to say, 'notice to quit,' to prevent the proceedings being reversed, and he left town. Here is a hiatus in his history, or rather in my history of him. Ricketts could fill this page." Mr Ricketts is good enough to recall for me his recollection of his schoolfellow and fellow-clerk at the Treasury. Their intimacy began, he says, "while St John was chafing like a caged eagle at the desk of a Government office." And here Mr Ricketts has some remarks which I cannot refrain from copying:—"If parents would but study the happiness and the probable success of their children rather than their own convenience in getting them off their hands, they would not commit such a fatal mistake as that of expecting a high-spirited lad, with our late friend's restless spirit and love of sport, to settle down to the drudgery of a clerkship. He had

talents, as you know ; he wrote a good hand, and worked with great rapidity, but his heart was elsewhere, and three or four years sufficed to prove the attempt an utter failure. During his periodical holidays he joined some friends in expeditions to the moors of the north of Scotland, where he found himself in his proper element, and whence he could not, or would not, tear himself to resume a duty which was odious to him, and his connection with the Treasury, which had begun in (I think) 1829, ceased about the latter part of 1833, or early in 1834.

Mr Ricketts says St John went little into general society ; “ the formalities of London life were irksome to him, and when, after he had left London some time, I visited him in his Ross-shire home, he seemed a far happier man than while writhing under the restraint of London conventionalities and official routine.”

Some of that early aversion for mixed society which Mr Ricketts describes in St John may, I think, be attributed to an impediment in his speech, which, like all such nervous affections, was most felt in his intercourse with strangers. It almost disappeared when he was among familiar friends, and with them his conversation was easy and flowing.

Mr Jeans, after speaking of St John's life as a Treasury clerk, says :—“ I next hear of him settled at Rosehall in Sutherland. The place was lent him by his cousin, the late Lord Bolingbroke, and here he lived a perfectly secluded wild life, having good scope for improving his experiences in natural history, and a wide range for indulging his tastes for shooting and fishing.”

It was on an expedition from Rosehall that St John met Miss Anne Gibson, to whom he was married in November 1834. Miss Gibson had some fortune, a commodity in which her husband was sadly unprovided, and as the lady, with a true wife's devotion, accommodated herself to her husband's tastes and manner of life, he was enabled henceforward to live the life of a sportsman and naturalist in the Highlands, which was only modified when the necessity of educating a young family induced them to draw near schools. The St Johns lived at various places rented with these views, chosen for their picturesque beauties, or capabilities of sport

and opportunities of study of wild animal life. I have heard him dwell especially on pleasant recollections of Rosehall—of Aldourie—a charming place of the Tytler family on Loch Ness, and some others beyond the Moray Firth. But in due time he discovered the region best suited to his taste and happiness in the “Laigh” of Moray, a fertile and well-cultivated country, with dry soil and bright and bracing climate, with wide views of sea and mountain, within easy distance of mountain sport, in the midst of the game and wild animals of a low country, and with the coast indented by bays of the sea and studded with frequent fresh-water lakes, the haunt of all the common wildfowl and of many of the rarer sorts. It was in that country, for the most part, that St John spent the last ten years of his active life, before he was struck by his fatal malady.

I became acquainted with Charles St John in my autumn vacation of 1844, while I was Sheriff of Moray. He was then living at Invererne, below Forres, and I used to shoot sometimes on an adjoining property. We had some common friends, and messages of civility had passed between us, but we had not yet met; when one day in October I was shooting down the river side, and the islands in the Findhorn, making out a bag of partridges laboriously. It was a windy day, and the birds going off wild spoilt my shooting, which is at best uncertain. While I was on the island, two birds had gone away wounded into a large turnip-field across the river. I waded the river after them, and was vainly endeavouring to recover them with my pointers, when a man pushed through the hedge from the Invererne side, followed by a dog making straight for me. There was no mistaking the gentleman—a sportsman all over, though without any “getting up” for sport, and without a gun. I waited for him, and on coming up he said he had seen my birds pitch, and offered to find them for me if I would take up my dogs. When my pointers were coupled, he called “Grip,” and his companion, a large poodle with a Mephistopheles expression, began travelling across and across the drills, till suddenly he struck the scent, and then with a series of curious jumps on all fours, and pauses between, to listen for the moving of the bird, he made quick

work with bird No. 1, and so with bird No. 2. I never saw so perfect a dog for retrieving, but he was not handsome.

After this introduction St John and I became frequent companions. I soon found there was something in him beyond the common slaughtering sportsman; and he must have discovered that the old sheriff had some tastes with which he could sympathise. The remainder of that season we were very much together, and often took our exercise and sport in company. On one of these



occasions we went together to join a battue at Dunphail; but the weather was too bad, and after waiting for some hours without taking our guns out of their cover, St John and I returned to Knockomie, a cottage of relations of mine near Forres, who have made it my second home for many years. We travelled in St John's dogcart through steady heavy rain. I was well clothed in a thick topcoat, and he in a pea-jacket of sealskins of his own shooting, so that there was no suffering from the weather as we

drove down through the shelter of the Altyre woods ; and the way was shortened to me by my companion telling story after story of sport and adventure, or answering with wonderful precision my questions about birds, beasts, and fishes. He stayed with me that night, and when we were alone after dinner, I broached a subject which had often come into my head since we were so much in each other's society. Why should he not give the world the benefit of his fresh enjoyment of sport—his accurate observation of the habits of animals ? At first he ridiculed the idea. He had never written anything beyond a note of correspondence—didn't think he could write, etc. etc. But at length he listened to some arguments. It was very true he had too much idle time, especially in winter—nothing he so much regretted as that he was an idle man. He had some old journals that might be useful. He could note down every day's observations, too. In short, he would try his hand on some chapters next winter. And so it came to pass, that during next winter I was periodically receiving little essays on mixed sport and natural history, which it was a great pleasure to me to criticise ; and no one could take the smooth and the rough of criticism more good-naturedly than St John. As these chapters gathered size and consistency, it became a question how to turn them to account, and this was solved by accident. At that time I was in the habit of writing an article occasionally for the *Quarterly*, and I put together one on Scotch sport, using as my material some of St John's chapters, especially the story of the Muckle Hart of Benmore. The paper pleased Mr Lockhart. " It would itself be sufficient " (he said) " to float any number. . . . Whether the capital journal laid under contribution be your own or another's I don't know, but everyone will wish to see more of it." * I received the Editor's letter at Knockomie, and, next day, the reading of it to St John served for seasoning as we took our shooting lunch together beside the spring among the whins on the brae of Blervie. Our course was now plain. I divided the money produce of the *Quarterly* article with St John, who rejoiced greatly in the first money he had ever made by his own exertions ; and, on

* Letter from J. G. Lockhart, 20th September 1845.



HEAD OF THE MUCKLE HART.

my next visit to London, I arranged for him the sale of the whole chapters, the produce of his last winter's industry, which Mr Murray brought out in the popular volume of "Wild Sports and Natural History in the Highlands."

St John's life was, I believe, much happier from the occupation thus supplied. He kept journals more regularly from thenceforward, and he became an authority to be consulted on all questions of Scotch sport. He had already become, I may say, the friend of all his neighbours, and many regretted his change of abode, which took place two years later.

St John formed acquaintance and commenced a life friendship with another person while at Invererne, whose tastes and habits much resembled his own—a good naturalist and accurate observer, a lover of sport on hill and river and loch, and, curiously, a keeper of a journal with much more regularity and accuracy than his friend ever arrived at. This was Captain Cumming, now Sir Alex. Gordon Cumming of Altyre, with whom St John, during the later years of his life, when they were brought nearer together in residence, associated, partook of sport, corresponded, more constantly and confidentially, perhaps, than with any other.

Unfortunately, St John was not in the habit of preserving his correspondents' letters, and I am thus able to give only one letter from Captain Cumming, which may have been in his friend's mind when he contrasts the salmon-fisher of the Findhorn with the gentle angler of the lower pools at p. 222, "Sport in Moray."

Sir Alexander's letter contains a wonderfully intelligible account of a morning's fishing. The scene is on the river Findhorn, above the junction of the Divie. *Rannoch* is the name of a spot where there is a "brig of ae hair," a single log thrown across the torrent.

From Captain A. P. G. CUMMING to Mr ST JOHN, June 20, 1848.

MY DEAR ST JOHN,—Do you remember saying a salmon was as good as lost if he went over the Ess on the Findhorn at Relugas? A strong and active fish played me a trick last week, and contradicted your idea, by taking me down from Rannoch over the Fall as far as the Pool above

the Divie junction. The night had been stormy, with heavy rain, and although I expected "she" would "grow" in the course of the day, I thought that by an early start I might get a few hours' fishing before the water came down, especially as fish very often take greedily *just before* a grow. I was at the river by 4 A.M., and commenced at Rannoch (Randolph's Leap). I found the water much as I left "her" the night before, small and clear, the only chance of fish being just in the white broken water at the throats of streams, or in the deep holes amongst the rocks. Rannoch is fishable only from one small ledge or bench, about two feet square, and 25 feet above the level of the water, to which bench you must scramble down the face of the rock, and from this spot you fish the whole pool, beginning with the line as the fly comes off the bar of the reel, and letting out yard by yard till the fly is working in the "spoots" or narrow rapids, 80 to 90 feet down the stream. If you hook him you must play and kill him in the pool, *if possible*, your gillie clipping him on a small bed of gravel down below your feet, it being impossible to follow him if he takes down the water, from the small two-feet-square ledge, without first ascending to the footpath, and redescending to the bed of the river; this you cannot manage with a fish on, owing to trees and projecting rocks. The pool is fished from the right bank.

Well, I rose him at my feet almost at the first throw, to a small fly about half an inch long; * he came deep and shy three times, and refused to take it or any other. I guessed him at about 17 lbs. Leaving him to his own reflections, after making an appointment with him for a later hour, I tried the pools above, hurrying along to the best spots in anticipation of the water rising. I worked till eight o'clock, keeping on the same fly described before. I had more than average sport, killing four good new-run fish, viz., one of 12 lbs., one 10 lbs., and two of 9 lbs. At eight, the water beginning to grow, I reeled up, and rushed down to Rannoch to show my early friend another fly; but the water having fairly commenced to grow, I put on a fly above two inches long,† and the tippet being triple gut, I, by an interposition of Providence, put on a triple casting line. Having cautiously descended to my stand, I showed

* Black floss silk body with golden orange tag, gold cord and silver speck, claret hackle with jay at shoulder; wing mixture of good mottled fibres and a gold crest, head yellow wool and tail of crest and fibres.

† Body yellow pig's wool, rough Spey hackle, and bright full wing.

it to him at once ; he made small bones of it this time, and rushing up like a bull-dog, or like one of your lovely peregrines, took the fly greedily. I just let him feel I was at the other end of the gear, and knew instinctively that the good steel was well into something firm. At first he seemed not quite to realise the situation, and after a few sulky and dangerous shakes of the head took to sailing steadily up and down the pool, once or twice approaching the rapids below, but turning again by gentle persuasion ; these tactics he continued for nearly an hour, my man waiting for him on the gravel below, and out of my sight. By this time the effects of the last night's rain became fully apparent, the still, dark pool below my feet had turned into a seething pot, without a quiet corner for the fish to rest in, and the water had risen nearly twenty-four inches above its size when I hooked him. The *upshot* was, he *shot down* the narrows, and went rolling heels over head down the foaming "Meux and Co.'s Entire" (this being the usual colour of our summer floods). To stop him was impossible ; I held on above the rapid till I thought my good Forrest rod would have gone at the hand, and certainly the fine single gut I had on earlier would have parted with half the strain.*

All I could do was to give him what line he required until he found a resting-place behind some rock ; this he did after rattling off fifty yards of line. Waiting some minutes till he seemed quiet, I threw off some ten yards more line, and turning the top of the rod up stream, I darted it down to my man on the gravel below, having cautioned him not to alarm the fish by letting the line get taut. To scramble up the rocks and down again to the gravel bed, to resume possession of my rod, was two or three minutes' work, and just as I seized hold of it, the fish, having ventured from his shelter, was, in spite of his efforts, hurried down at racing pace, taking more line than I liked, while I followed, crawling and leaping along some impossible-looking country, such as I would not have faced in cold blood.

By this time he had nearly reached the Ess or fall, and all seemed

* *Memo, en parenthèse.*—I once asked several old sportsmen what weight was on the line at the very heaviest strain you could put on with rod in hand, as when holding on like grim death to an insubordinate fish, the end of the line being attached to the hook of a spring balance—*i.e.*, what weight the balance would register. One man guessed 35 lbs., another, laughing at him, said he would bet 20 lbs. to be nearer the mark ; none guessed less than 15 lbs. ! The fact is, you cannot, with the best and strongest tackle, draw out more than 3 or 4 lbs.

lost. I do not think he really intended going over ; for when he felt himself within the influence of the strong smooth water, he tried his best to return, but in vain. Over he went like a shot, and long ere I could get round some high rocks and down to the lower part of the fall, I had 80 or 90 yards of line out, and to follow him farther on this side of the water was not possible, owing to the steep rock rising beside the stream. To add to the embarrassment of my position, I found, on raising the point of my rod, that in going over the fall the fish had passed beneath some arch deep under water, thus making my case appear very hopeless. But, determined not to give it up yet, I sent my man up to the house of Relugas, where he found an old three-pronged dung fork and a garden line, with which we managed to construct a grapnel ; and at the second throw in, I got hold of the line below the sunken arch ; then fastening it to my right hand, I made my man throw the whole line off the reel and through the rings, and having drawn the remainder of the line through the sunken arch, and clear of the impediment, I formed a coil, and with my left hand pitched the end of it up to him, when he passed it through the rings again from the top of the rod, fixed it to the axle of the reel, and handed me down the rod to where I stood. From the long line out and the heavy water, I could not tell whether the fish was on or not, but the line looked greatly chafed all along.

I now tried the only plan to end the business. Leaving my man holding the rod, I went to a bridge some distance up the river, and having crossed to the other side and come down opposite him, he pitched the rod over to me. I felt that, if he was still on, I was sure of him, and reeling steadily up the 80 yards which were out, I followed down to the big round pool below, where, to my surprise, I became aware that he was still on. He made but a feeble resistance, and after a fight of two hours and forty minutes, we got the clip into as gallant a fish as ever left the sea—weight, $19\frac{1}{2}$ lbs., and new run. The last hour and a half was in a roaring white flood. The fly was, as you may imagine, well “chawed up.”

The neighbourhood of Invererne to the basin of the Findhorn—the resort of innumerable wildfowl ; the sandhills of Culbin so curious, almost so marvellous ; the “Black Forest,” stretching away behind Brodie and Dalvey ; the “Old Bar,” where the seals love to sun themselves on the sand ; the mouth of the Muckleburn, the favourite haunt of the otter—made it a most desirable

residence for a naturalist and sportsman like St John. It was there he filled the bag of various game for me which he describes in "Wild Sports" (p. 277), and which he announced to me almost in the same terms in a letter I have still preserved. It was from Invererne at a later time he wrote to me—"I can soon make out a chapter for every month of the year, in the shape of letter or journal, so as to form a volume," an intention which he partially carried out under the title of "Field Notes of a Naturalist," and the materials for which, on a more complete scale, are comprised in "Sport in Moray."

It was at Invererne that he first took into his service old Rennie as a keeper, who figures in his books and notes as "Donald." Some of the qualities he ascribes to Donald are imaginary, or belonged to some predecessor of Rennie, perhaps a Sutherland Highlander. But the old man has some of "Donald's" characteristics strongly developed. To shoot flying was not much in his way; his master could do that pretty well for himself. He was no dog-breaker either. I fear he preferred a dog who could help to kill as well as find game. But he had some countervailing merits in his master's eyes. He was well acquainted with the habits of wildfowl, and could take you up to swans or wild-geese when the ground seemed impossible. The otters were his own children; he could tell you their outgoings and incomings as if by intuition. Then he was patient of cold and wet, and fatigue, and long watching, and was a most useful slave, if not a director of sport. He has fallen into evil days since his master's death. He has only occasional employment, and is apt sometimes to forget a march in pursuit of some favourite chase. I am sure the gentlemen of Moray will not be too severe on the peccadilloes of St John's old "Donald."

I think it was at Whitsunday 1847 that St John moved his household to a little villa beside Nairn, where he had the advantage again of friendly neighbours on both sides. It was from that abode that he became so well acquainted with the mosses and lochs about Lochlee,* where Harry shot his first wild goose.

* [Loch Loy on the maps.—ED.]

In 1848 and 1849 he spent some time in Edinburgh, making excursions from thence to Newcastle on the one hand, and into Sutherland on the other. From his early residence at Rosehall, Sutherland had always interest with St John. But no one could live an open-air life on the coast of Moray without being attracted powerfully to the most picturesque outline of the Sutherland shore. The country was then little known. Its mountains, seen across the great firth, are most peculiar and picturesque in outline, suggesting ideas of great insulated mountains and precipices, of different structure from the continuous ranges of our midland highlands. There were rumours, too, of eagles, land and water eagles, now exterminated elsewhere, still holding their ancient reign there, and it was known that the line of limitation of the breeding of several birds of passage ran through the northern peninsula, which gave it much additional interest with a naturalist who studied and desired to collect eggs as well as birds. All these things were inducements with St John, and led to his recording his wanderings across the Moray Firth, in two pretty volumes, which, for some reasons not worth pointing out, have not been so popular as his earlier work. One chapter of that book—a vivid description of hill sport in winter—forms the last chapter of “Sport in Moray;” another, without date, but which seems to embody his recollection of life at Rosehall, I have been induced to add as an appendix to this Memoir. In the autumn of 1849 he established his family at “The College” beside Elgin—a most convenient and pleasant residence for a sportsman with a family to educate. The house was large enough, and there was a big wild garden with some great old trees and surrounded by an old ivy-grown wall, which served as a secure retreat for the pets of himself and his boys. There is a pleasant society in and round the old cathedral city, embracing some men of science and students of nature, with whom St John soon became a favourite. The children had the advantage of good schools; and for sport and the study of the habits of animals, was there not the Loch of Spynie and the rocks of Covesea, where the peregrine breeds? St John’s

enjoyment of his Elgin residence was much increased by his friend and companion in sport, Captain Gordon Cumming, or later, Major Gordon Cumming, having a house in the neighbourhood.

His life at Elgin was indeed, I believe, very happy. His letters were full of active pursuits, with now a fair mixture of literary work. All his talents were turned to account. No walk or drive but furnished a note on his favourite study. He no longer complained that he was an idle man.

I sometimes visited him at "The College," and used to admire, perhaps a little to envy, his manner of living among his children. The boys were the constant companions of his sport when school permitted, and sometimes the schoolmaster was forgotten when the car came to the door to take papa and Rennie to the Loch. Then, on return, there were the contents of the game-bag to examine—rare specimens to note, and sometimes to preserve and stuff after Mr Hancock's directions, who was a great friend and ally of old and young. In the evening the drawing-room table was a pretty sight. Some rare bird, or if no rarity offered, a good, handsome, old blackcock was displayed *en pose* for the artists, and father and children made studies in water-colours of a head, a claw, or a tail of the fine bird. Without pretending to much skill in art, St John drew easily and coloured dexterously what was placed before him, and he made all his children able to do the same. I remember with what pride he showed me the journals sent him by Harry on his first voyage in Admiral Seymour's ship, where the young midshipman described the places he visited as well as he could, and supplied defects by views drawn on the margin.

St John spent some happy years at Elgin, and his friends looked forward to many days of life and enjoyment for one so vigorous and active, and of most temperate and healthy habits; but this was not to be. He had been for a long time subject to violent attacks of nervous headache, quite disabling him for any exertion; but these were of short duration, and we little thought that they might be symptomatic of some cerebral affection, as it seems they

were. He had one of the worst of those overpowering headaches in the beginning of December 1853, but in a few days he had apparently thrown off the disease, and on Tuesday, 6th December, was on his way out to shoot when he was struck down by paralysis of the whole left side. He was carried home quite powerless, assisted by Major W. Pitcairn Campbell, 23rd Fusiliers, but retaining his senses entire. In the midst of overwhelming grief for such a calamity, Mrs St John and the whole family did what their strength allowed to alleviate his sufferings, but it required a man's strength to move the helpless sufferer, constantly requiring change of posture; and he owed much of what rendered life supportable, for some weeks, to the untiring and tender care of his friend Major Gordon Cumming.

He never recovered the use of his limbs, but his health was so far restored as to allow of his trying a change of air and scene. He moved to Brighton, and afterwards to Southampton, without deriving much benefit from medical treatment or change of climate. His heart still clung to the scene of his youthful sport, and to the last he indulged the hope of returning "to some place between Spey and Ness," but in vain. He died at Woolston, near Southampton, on the 12th July 1856.

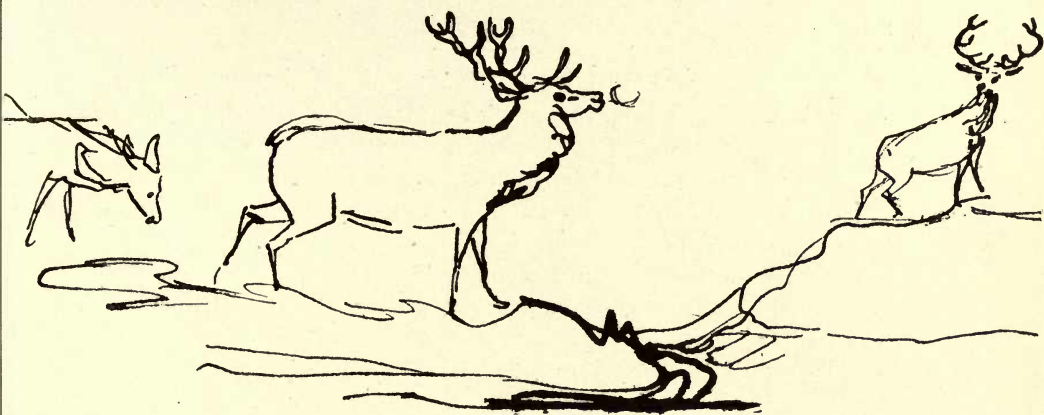
He was buried in the Southampton cemetery. At his feet, within his coffin, was placed, by his own desire, the skull of "Leo," a favourite retriever, "Grip's" successor.

Of the many amiable qualities which endeared him to his family and his personal friends I must not speak. I may be allowed to point out for imitation the extreme care and accuracy of his observations of nature—a rare merit—and his guarded and simple statements of the results. His taste for rural pleasures, his love of sport, and his natural unaffected style, will long endear his memory to naturalists.

C. INNES.



SOUTH COLLEGE, ELGIN.



LIFE AT ROSEHALL.

IN my sporting excursions I frequently prefer being alone and independent of either friend or keeper; not from any disinclination to the society of my fellow-men—far from it—but from a liking to watch and observe the habits and proceedings of many of the living animals of the country. Now, one's friend may become bored by being carried off from his shooting, and being hampered by the movements of another person whose attention for the time being is taken up in following some bird or beast not included in the game-book, and therefore not deemed worthy of notice during the shooting season. If my own larder or that of my friend is in want of replenishing, I can fill it as well and quickly as most people; but at other times I like to take my shooting quietly. In deer-stalking the solitary sportsman has often great advantages, though his enjoyment of the sport is much enhanced by the thought that he has some friend, some “fidus Achates,” to whom he can relate the incidents of the day, and who, following the same pursuits, will enjoy and appreciate the account of the pains and fatigues he has undergone before bringing down the noble animal whose horns he exhibits in triumph. Much of my deer-stalking time was spent alone, or at most with no companionship save that of an ancient and experienced Highlander, or a chance visitor—some travelling laird or sportsman—who was as glad to receive as

I was to give provend and rest for himself and horses. From these circumstances I got into the habit of sketching off an account of my day's wanderings, when they had been of that kind that I felt I might say to myself, "*Forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit.*"

I had more than once seen in a particular corrie, or not far from it, a remarkably fine stag: his horns, though not peculiarly long, were heavy and large, with ten points well and evenly set on, of a dark colour, and the points as white as ivory. The animal himself was evidently of very great size and age, and in fine condition.



He lived quite alone, and did not seem to associate with any of the other deer who frequented that district, although I once saw him rise and trot off, warned by the movement of a herd of hinds; and at another time he rose unexpectedly on my firing at two stags in a corrie; still, on neither of these occasions, nor at any other time, did he appear to be lying in company with the other deer, although not above half a mile from them, nor did he join them in their flight when moved. Instead of this he invariably trotted off sulkily; and if I chanced to fall in with his track again, it was

still solitary, and speeding in a direct course over bog and hill to some far-off mountain glen or corrie. The shepherds, who generally gave me notice of any particularly fine stag they might see in their rounds, distinguished this one by a Gaelic name signifying the big red stag, as, besides his other attributes, his colour was of a peculiarly bright red. Donald and I had made an unsuccessful raid or two into "the red stag's" country, some unforeseen circumstance always warning him of our neighbourhood too soon; besides which he had a troublesome habit of suddenly rising in the most unaccountable manner from some unexpected corner or hollow. We might examine long and carefully the whole face of a hill, and having made ourselves perfectly sure that nothing larger than a mountain hare could be concealed on its surface, up would rise "the red stag" from some trifling hollow, or from behind some small hillock, and without looking to the right or left, off he would go at his usual trot, till we lost him in the distance.

Another time, after we had beat, as we imagined, a whole wood, so that we were convinced that neither deer nor roe could have been passed over, up would get the stag out of some clump of larch or birch, apparently scarcely big enough to hold a hare, or else he would rise at the very feet of one of the beaters, and though not above a hundred yards from the corner where I was posted he always managed to turn back, perhaps almost running over some man who had no gun; but he invariably escaped being shot at, excepting on one occasion, when I placed a friend who was with me near a pass by which the stag sometimes left a favourite wood. I had stationed the shooter at the distance of half a mile from the wood, as the deer was always most careful of himself, and most suspicious of danger, when he first left the cover. On this occasion, according to my friend's account, the great beast had trotted quickly and suddenly passed him at eighty yards distance, and took no notice of the barrels discharged at his broadside, though fired by a very good shot, and out of a first-rate Manton gun that carried ball like a rifle. My friend could not account for missing him; but missed he evidently was.

I determined one day to start off alone in pursuit of this stag, and to pay no attention to any other deer I might see during my excursion. Donald's orders were to meet me at a well known rock, about eight miles from home, the next day at two o'clock; my intention being, in the event of my not returning the same night, to work my way to a distant shepherd's house, and there to sleep. Donald had directions as to the line by which he was to come, that he might not disturb one or two favourite corries; and he was also to bring a setter and my shooting apparatus, as I took



with me only a single-barrel rifle and a few bullets. I did not take "Bran," as, being alone, I could not be quite sure that he would not be in my way when getting up to the deer, if I should find him; but I took a dog of a very different kind—a powerful bull-dog, who was well accustomed to deer-stalking, and who would lie down for an hour together if commanded, without moving an inch.

On leaving the house at daybreak, or at least before the sun had risen, I struck off in a straight line through the woods, till,

having got through the whole cover, I sat myself down on the top of what was called the Eagle's Craig, and turned, for the first time that morning, to the east to look at the sun, which was now rising in its utmost glory and brightness—a glorious sight, and one that loses not its interest though seen each returning day, particularly when viewed from the lonely places either of land or sea. Below me lay a great extent of pine-wood, concealing the house and the cultivated land around it, with the exception of a glimpse caught here and there of the bright green meadow which formed the banks of the river. The river itself was visible through many openings, and where the outline of the trees was lower than in other places. Beyond the river rose a black moorland, which, growing gradually higher and higher, terminated in mountains with a most varied and fantastic outline of peaks and precipices, the stony sides of which were lighted up by the rising sun, and exhibited a strong contrast to the deep colour of the hills below them, covered with dark heather, and not yet reached by the sun's rays.

On the other side the ground was of quite a different character. Immediately on leaving the wood the country for some distance had a dreary, cold look, being covered not with heather, but with a kind of gray grass, called there deer's grass, which grows only in cold swampy ground. Here and there this was varied by ranges of gray stone and rock, and dotted with numerous lochs. In the distance to the west I could see the upper part of a favourite rocky corrie, the sun shining brightly on its gray rocks. A little to my right the fir-woods terminated, but on that side, between me and the river, of which every bend and reach was there in full view, were numerous little hillocks overgrown with birch trees, old and rugged. Here and there, amongst these hillocks, rose a great round gray rock, and the whole of this rough ground was intersected with bright green glades. Some three miles up the river a blue line of smoke ascended perpendicularly in the still morning, the chimney it came from being concealed by a group of birch-trees.

I looked carefully with my glass at all the nooks and grassy

places to see if any deer were feeding about them, but could see nothing but two or three old roe. A moment after a pair of young roe walked quietly out of some concealed hollow, and after gazing about a short time and having a game of romps on the top of a hillock, were joined by their mother, and then all three came into the woods at the foot of the craig where I was sitting. The grouse were calling to each other in all directions, and every now and then an old cock-bird would take a short fly, crowing, to some stone or hillock, where he stood and sunned himself. I was struck just then by the curious proceedings of a mountain-hare, who had been feeding about two hundred yards from me. She suddenly began to show symptoms of uneasiness and fear, taking short runs and then stopping, and turning her ears towards the hill-side behind her. I soon saw the cause of her alarm in a beautiful marten cat; the latter, however, having probably already made her morning meal, took little notice of the hare, but came with quiet leaps straight towards me. As I was well concealed amongst the gray fragments of rock which covered the top of the craig, and which were exactly the same colour as the clothes I was dressed in, the little animal did not see me. When about thirty yards off she suddenly stopped and looked in my direction, having evidently become aware, through some of her fine senses, of the vicinity of an enemy. She offered me a fair shot, and, well aware of the quantity of game killed by these animals, I sent a rifle ball right into her yellow chest as she sat upright with her head turned towards me.

But time advanced, so I delayed no longer, and started off in a westerly direction. Many a weary mile did I tramp that day without seeing anything but grouse and an occasional hare. Nevertheless, I saw many fresh tracks of red deer; particularly crossing one mossy piece of ground, where there appeared to have been at least twenty or thirty deer, and amongst them one or two large stags. In one place I saw a solitary track of a noble stag, but it was two or three days old. I judged that the herd whose tracks I saw had a good chance of being in or about a corrie, of which I should get a view from the next height; but after a

long and tiresome survey of the ground I could see no living creature, excepting a heron, who was standing in his usual disconsolate attitude on a stone in the burn that ran out of the corrie, adding by his very presence to the solitude of the scene. "I don't understand where these deer can be," was my internal ejaculation, "but here they are not; so come on, good dog." Another and another height did I pass over, and many a glen did I scan inch by inch till my eyes ached with straining through the glass. Nothing could I see, and I began to think to myself that as it was past two and the shepherd's house was some three hours' walk off, I had better turn in that direction; so slanting my course a little to the north, I pulled my plaid round me and walked on. In deer-stalking, as much as in the everyday pursuits of life, the old adage holds good—

credula vitam

Spes fovet;

and this said hope carries the weary stalker over many a long mile. I came in half an hour to a large extent of heather-covered ground, interspersed with a great number of tumulus-shaped hillocks. I was looking carelessly over these, when my eye was suddenly attracted by a red-coloured spot on one of the mounds. I turned the glass upon it, and at once saw that it was a large bright-coloured stag with fine antlers, and altogether an animal worth some trouble. He was in a very difficult situation to approach. He commanded a complete view of the face of the hill opposite to him and over the summit of which I was looking, and I was astonished he had not observed me, notwithstanding all my care. As the wind blew, I could not approach him from the opposite direction, even if I had time to get round there before he rose; and I knew that once on foot to feed, his direction would be so uncertain amongst the mounds that my chance would be small.

After a short survey I started off at my best pace to the right, thinking that from the nature of the ground I might succeed in getting into the valley unobserved; and once there

by taking advantage of some hillock, I should have a tolerable chance of approaching him. After what appeared to me a long tramp, I came to a slight rise of the shoulder of the hill. Beyond this was a hollow, by keeping in which I hoped to get down unobserved. It was already past three, but the stag had not yet moved; so, keeping the tops of his horns in view, I began to crawl over the intervening height. At two or three places which I tried, I saw that I could not succeed. At last I came to a more favourable spot, but I saw that it still would not do, however well the dog behaved, and a capital stalker he was, imitating and following every movement of mine, crouching when I crouched, and crawling when I crawled. I did not wish to leave him quite so far from the deer, so I made another cast, and this time found a place over which we both wriggled ourselves quite unseen. Thank heaven! was my exclamation, as I found myself in a situation where I could stand upright again. Few people excepting deer-stalkers know the luxury of standing upright, after having wormed oneself horizontally along the ground for some time. There were the horns with their white tips still motionless, excepting when he turned back his head to scratch his hide, or knock off a fly. I now walked forward without stooping till I was within three or four hundred yards of him, when I was suddenly pulled up by finding that there was no visible manner of approaching a yard nearer. The last sheltered mound was come to; and although these mounds from a distance looked scattered closely, when I got amongst them I found they were two or three rifle-shots apart at the nearest. There was one chance still: a rock or rather stone lay about eighty yards from the stag, and it seemed that I might make use of this as a screen so as, if my luck was great, to get at the animal. I took off my plaid, laid it on the ground, and ordered the dog to lie still on it; then buttoning my jacket tight, and putting a piece of cork, which I carried for the purpose, into the muzzle of my rifle to prevent the dirt getting into it, I started in the most snake-like attitude that the human frame would admit of. I found that by keeping perfectly flat, and not even

looking up once, I could still get on unobserved. Inch by inch I crawled; as I neared the stone my task was easier, as the ground sank a little and the heather was longer. At last I reached the place, and saw the tips of his horns not above eighty yards from me. I had no fear of losing him now; so, taking out the cork from my rifle, I stretched my limbs one by one, and prepared to rise to an attitude in which I could shoot; then, pushing my rifle slowly forward, I got the barrel over the stone unperceived, and rose very gradually on one knee. The stag seemed to be intent on watching the face of the opposite hill, and, though I was partially exposed, did not see me; his attitude



was very favourable, which is seldom the case when a stag is lying down; so, taking a deliberate aim at his shoulder, I was on the point of firing, when he suddenly saw me, and jumping up, made off as hard as he could. He went in a slanting direction, and before he had gone twenty yards I fired. I was sure that I was steady on him, but the shot only seemed to hurry his pace; on he went like an arrow out of a bow, having showed no symptom of being hurt beyond dropping his head for a single moment.

I remained motionless in despair; a more magnificent stag I had never seen, and his bright red colour and white-tipped horns showed me that he was the very animal I had so often seen and

wished to get. He ran on without slackening his pace for at least a hundred yards, then suddenly fell with a crash to the ground, his horns rattling against the stones. I knew he was perfectly dead, so, calling the dog, ran up to him. The stag was quite motionless, and lay stretched out where he fell. I found on opening him that the ball had passed through the lower part of his heart—a wound I should have imagined sufficient to have deprived any animal of life and motion instantaneously. But I have shot several deer through the heart, and have observed that when hit low they frequently ran from twenty to eighty yards. If, however, the ball has passed through the upper part of the heart, or has cut the large blood-vessels immediately above it, death has been instantaneous, the animal dropping without a struggle.

Having duly admired and examined the poor stag, not without the usual compunction at having put an end to his life, I set to work, bleeding and preparing him for being left on the hill till the next day, secure from attacks of ravens and eagles; then, having taken my landmarks so as to be sure of finding him again, I started on my march to the shepherd's house, looking rather anxiously round at the increasing length of my shadow and the diminished height of the sun; as I had to pass some very boggy ground with which I was not very well acquainted. I had not gone a quarter of a mile, however, when I saw the shepherd himself making his way homewards. I gave a loud whistle to catch his attention, and having joined him, I took him back to show the exact place where the stag was lying, to save myself the trouble of returning the next day. Malcolm was rather an ally of mine, and his delight was great at seeing the stag.

"'Deed aye, sir; it's just the muckle red stag himsel'; mony a time I've seen the bonny beast. Save us! how red his pile is!"

"Yes, he is a fine beast, Malcolm; and you must bring your gray pony for him to-morrow. I must have the head and one haunch down to the house; take the rest to your mother; I daresay she can salt it."

I knew pretty well that this good lady must have had some

experience in making red deer hams, unless Malcolm was very much slandered by his neighbours ; nevertheless, he had promised me not to poach on my ground, and knowing that I trusted quite to his honour, I believe that he neither did so himself nor allowed any one else to do so.

"You are ower good, your Honour ; and the mither will be glad of a bit venison ; it's a long time now since I killed a deer."

"When was the last, Malcolm ?" I asked.

"Ou, mony a day sine, sir ; but, to tell the truth, it is only yesterday since I fired at one."

"And where was that, Malcolm ?"

"Why, if your Honour wants to know, and I am sure you will do no ill turn to a lad for taking a shoot, I'll just tell you."

I could not help smiling at Malcolm's describing himself as a lad. He stood six feet three inches without his shoes, and a perfect giant in every proportion, but strong and active withal, and a capital stalker, being able to wind his great body about through moss and heather in a manner that was quite marvellous. Malcolm's account, then, was, that a shepherd on an adjoining property, or rather on one divided from where we were by a long lake, had asked him to come up some evening with his gun to "fleg" some deer that had been destroying his little crop of oats. Well, Malcolm had gone ; and the evening before I met him he had fired in the dusk at a stag with a handful of large slugs ; the deer was hit and crippled, but had thrown out the collie dogs which had pursued him by taking to the water and apparently swimming the loch. If he had managed to cross he must be on my side of it, and I might by chance fall in with him on my return home the next day in some of the burns and glens through which I should have to walk. I did not blame Malcolm much, knowing the mischief done by deer to the shepherd's little crops ; besides which the ground where he had shot this stag was not preserved or used as a forest by the owner.

We had a weary walk, though enlivened by Malcolm's conversation. Without his company and guidance I should have had some difficulty in finding my way through the rough ground over

which we had to pass. The night, too, had come on quite dark before we reached the shealing.

On entering I was much struck by the group which we saw by the light of several splinters of a bog-fir laid on stone. Malcolm's old father, a man whose years numbered at least fourscore, was reading a chapter of the Bible in Gaelic to the rest of his family, which consisted of his wife, a woman of nearly equal age to himself, but hale, neat, and vigorous, and of a sister and brother of Malcolm's; the former a peculiarly pretty, though somewhat extensive damsel; and the latter a giant like Malcolm himself, equally good-looking, and equally respected in his own rank of life. The old man, having looked off his book for a moment, without pausing in his reading, continued his chapter. Following Malcolm's example, I took off my cap, and sat down on a chest in the room, and though, of course, not understanding a word of what was read, I was struck by the appearance of real devotion and reverence of the whole group, and looked on with feelings of interest and respect till he came to the end of a somewhat lengthy chapter. This finished, the old man, resting his head on his hands, which his long grey hair entirely covered, uttered a short prayer in the same language. The moment this was done he handed the Bible to his daughter, who, wiping it with her apron, deposited it in a chest. I was then welcomed with great kindness, and preparations were made for Malcolm's and my supper, which consisted of tea, oatcake, eggs, and a part of a kippered trout, caught in a stream running out of the large loch, and which when alive must have weighed at least twelve pounds; such cream and milk, too, as are met with, or at any rate enjoyed, only in the Highlands. With real politeness the old people talked to me but little during the meal, seeing that I was tired and hungry; but over the glass of capital toddy which succeeded the tea I had many a question to answer respecting the killing of the stag, etc. The old lady spoke very little English, but understood it well enough. The old shepherd listened with great interest, the more so from having been a somewhat famous stalker in his own time, and now a great lamenter of the good old time when deer and black cattle were more plentiful,

and sheep comparatively few to what they are in the present day.

Before the earliest grouse-cock had shaken his plumage and called his mate from her heather couch, I had left my sleeping-place in the building that did duty for a barn, where deep in the straw, and wrapped in my plaid, I had slept sound as a deer-stalker, and I fancy no person sleeps more soundly. I had preferred going to roost in the clean straw to passing the night within the house, knowing by former experience that Malcolm's shealing was tenanted by myriads of nocturnal insects, which, like the ancient Britons, "*feri hospitibus*," would have left me but little quiet during the night. The last time I had slept there, all the fleas in the shealing, "*novitatis avidi*," had issued out and fallen on the body of the unlucky stranger. Tempted by the clean and fresh appearance of the good lady's sheets, I had trusted my tired limbs to their snowy whiteness, when, sallying forth from every crevice and every corner, the legion of insects had hopped on me to enjoy the treat of a supper of English blood. The natives of these places seem quite callous to everything of the kind.

To continue, however. After making good use of the burn that rippled along within fifty yards of the house, and having eaten a most alarming quantity of the composition called porridge, I sallied forth alone. Malcolm and his brother would fain have accompanied me, but the latter had to attend some gathering of sheep in a different direction, and Malcolm was obliged to go for the stag killed yesterday. He therefore only walked a few hundred yards up the first hill with me, in order to impress well on my recollection the different glens and burns he wished me to look at on my way to the place of rendezvous with old Donald. The sun was but a little distance above the horizon when I gained the summit of a tolerably long and steep ascent immediately behind Malcolm's house. A blackcock or two rose wild from some cairn of stones or hillock, where they had been enjoying the earliest rays of the sun, and flew back over my head to take shelter in the scattered birch thickets near the shealing; and

here and there a pack of grouse rose, alighting again before they had flown a hundred yards, as if fully understanding that grouse shooting was not the order of the day, and strutting along with their necks stretched up, seemed to care little for my presence. The ring-ousel flitted from rock to rock, uttering its wild and sweet note. Truly there is great enjoyment gained by the early riser; everything in nature has a pleasant aspect, and seems happy and thankful to see the light of another sun.

The great mountain to the west looked magnificent as its gray corries and cliffs were lighted up by the morning rays. A noble pile of rock and heather is that mountain, and well named Ben Mhor, or the Big Mountain—not a triton amongst minnows, but a triton amongst tritons. The golden eagle, to add grandeur to the scene, was sweeping through the sky high above me, and apparently eyeing my canine companion with mingled curiosity and appetite. Once or twice in his circles he came so near that I was half inclined to send a rifle-ball at him, but as often as I stopped my walk with this intention, the noble bird wheeled off again, and at last, remembering his breakfast hour was past, flew off in a straight line at a great height towards the loch to the north of us, where he probably recollected having seen some dead or sickly sheep during his flight homewards the evening before.

I had several hours to spare before the time of meeting Donald, so I diverged here and there, wherever I thought it likely I should find deer, and then kept a northerly course in order to look at some burns and grassy ground near the loch, according to Malcolm's advice. The loch itself was bright and beautiful, and the small islands on it looked like emeralds set in silver. With my glass I could distinguish eight or nine wild geese, as they ruffled the water in their morning gambols, having probably just returned from grazing on the short green grass that grew on different spots near the water's edge. These grassy places were the sites of former habitations, and were still marked by the line of crumbled walls, now the constant resort of the few wild geese that breed every year on the lonely and unvisited islands of the loch.

Below me there was a capital flat for deer, a long sloping valley with a winding burn flowing through the middle, along the banks of which were grassy spots where they constantly fed. I searched this long and carefully with my glass, but saw nothing excepting a few small companies of sheep which were feeding in different flocks about the valley. So famous, however, was this place as the resort of deer, that I took good care not to show myself, and crawled carefully into a hollow run, which, leading to the edge of the burn, would enable me to walk almost unseen for a long distance, and I thought that there might still be deer feeding in some bend of the watercourse, where they had escaped my search. Before I had walked many hundred yards down the course of the burn, I saw such traces as convinced me they had been feeding there within a few hours; so, arranging my plaid and rifle I walked stealthily and slowly onwards, expecting to see them every moment. The nature of the ground was such that I might come on them quite unperceived; the dog, too, showed symptoms of scenting something, putting his nose to the tracks and then looking wistfully in my face, watching every movement of my rifle. The inquiring expression of his face was perfect; whenever I stopped to look over or around some projecting angle of rock, he kept his eyes fixed on my face, as if to read in it whether my search was successful or not. A deer-stalker in the situation I was in would make a good subject for a painter. I wound my way silently and slowly through the broken rock and stone which formed the bed of the burn, showing in their piled-up confusion that the water must at some times rage and rush with the fury and power of an Alpine torrent, though now it danced merrily along, rippling through the stones and forming tiny pools here and there where it had not strength enough to break through the accumulated sand and gravel which dammed up its feeble stream. Dressed in gray, and surrounded with gray stone on every side, I was as little conspicuous as it was possible to be, and there was just enough ripple in the stream and its thousand miniature cascades to drown the sound of my footsteps, whenever I inadvertently put my foot on any stone

that grated or slipped below me. The only thing that annoyed me was an occasional sheep that would see me from the bank above, and by running off in a startled manner was likely to warn the deer, if there were any ahead of me, of the vicinity of an enemy. I had continued this course for some distance, when just as I began to turn off in order to cross the valley to look over the next height, and had made up my mind that the deer whose recent traces I had seen must have slipped away unobserved—just then, on turning a corner, I caught a momentary glimpse of the hind-quarters of one of the wished-for animals walking slowly round a turn in the burn. I stopped, fearing they had seen or heard me, and I expected to see them leap out of the hollow and make away across the valley; but not seeing this happen, I walked carefully on, and came in view of nine deer, hinds and calves, who were feeding quietly on a little piece of table-land close to the burn. I also saw the long ears of another appearing beyond and above the rest, evidently being on the lookout. They seemed to have no suspicion of an enemy, and when they stopped to gaze about them their heads were turned more towards the plain around than to the course of the burn. The sentry, too, was seemingly occupied with looking out in every direction excepting where I was. They were not more than two hundred yards off, and I judged that by advancing quickly the moment that they turned the next corner, I should be able to get unperceived within forty or fifty yards. The single hind had disappeared too, having gone over a small rise. I put on a new copper cap, and felt sure of an easy shot; the dog, though he did not see the deer, perfectly understood what was going on, and seemed afraid to breathe lest he should be heard. Amongst the herd were two fine barren hinds, both in capital condition. I did not care which of the two I might kill, but determined to have one, and was already beginning to reckon on Donald's delight at my luck in getting a fine hind as well as the stag I had killed yesterday. All the hinds had now gone out of sight, and I moved on. At that very moment the sentry hind, a long-legged, ragged, donkey-like beast, came back to the mound

where she had been before, and her sharp eyes instantly detected me. Never did unlucky wight, caught in the very act of doing what he least wished should be known, feel, or, I dare say, look so taken aback as I was. I stood motionless for a moment, hoping that even HER eyesight might be deceived by my gray dress, but it was too late ; giving a snort of alarm, she was instantly out of sight. I ran forwards, trusting to be in time for a running shot at some straggler, and came in view of the whole troop galloping away, a tolerably long shot off, but still within range, and affording a fair broadside mark as they went along in single file to gain the more level ground. I of course pulled up, and took a deliberate aim at one of the fat hinds. She afforded me a fair enough chance, but I saw, the moment I pulled the trigger, that I had missed her. The ball struck and splintered a rock, and must have passed within a very few inches of the top of her shoulder. I saw my error, which was that, miscalculating the distance, I had fired a little too high. However, it was too late to remedy it ; so I stood quietly watching with a kind of vague hope that my ball might have passed through her shoulder, though in reality I was sure this was not the case. They never stopped till they reached the very summit of one of the heights that enclosed the valley, and then they all halted in a group for two or three minutes, standing in clear and strong-relief against the sky. After looking back for a short time towards the point of alarm, they disappeared over the top of the hill, and I reloaded my rifle, and then went to examine the exact spot where my ball had struck. Judging from the height it was from the ground, I saw the hind had had a very narrow escape, and muttered to myself, "Not a bad shot after all, though unlucky ; well, I'm glad it was not a fine stag—never mind the hinds." It's pleasant to find consolation—"rebus in adversis ;" my dog in the meantime scented about a good deal, and seemed to wonder that I had missed.

I now turned off out of my stony path, and walked across a long tract of easy ground. There were several likely spots in my way, but no deer were to be found ; and an hour before my time

I arrived at the trysting-place, which was a peculiarly-shaped large rock, standing in the midst of a great extent of ground covered with gray stones, and rocks of a similar description, but all much smaller. The rock itself rejoiced in a Gaelic name signifying the "Devil's Stone." It was a curious spot—a wide and gentle slope of a hill perfectly covered with these gray stones, looking as if they had dropped in a shower from the clouds. They ended abruptly near the foot of the hill, and formed almost a straight line, as if some giant workman had done his best to clear the remainder of the slope, and had picked all the stones off that part, as farmers do off a grass field. Upwards towards the top of the hill they increased, if possible, in number, and the summit appeared like one mass of rock. Through all this desolation of stone there were several strips of heather, or withered-looking grass, not much wider, however, than footpaths. These served as passes for any sheep and deer which might fancy journeying through them.

I reached my point of rendezvous, and sat down to wait patiently for Donald, with my face turned in the direction whence he was to arrive. I knew that, unless detained by any quite unforeseen accident, he would arrive rather before than after his time, as he was to bring me something in the shape of luncheon; the liquid part of which I was confident he would not forget.

I waited some time in this solitude, without hearing or seeing any living creature to enliven the dreary landscape before me, with the exception of a pair of ravens who passed at no great height above me, uttering their harsh croaks of ill omen as they winged their way in a direct course, to feast on the remains of some dead sheep or deer.

My attention was suddenly roused, however, by hearing a couple of shots in quick succession, the sound coming from the direction in which I expected Donald. As the reports did not appear to be at any great distance, I rose with the intention of going to meet him; though I could not understand what he was shooting at, it being quite against both his and my ideas of pro-

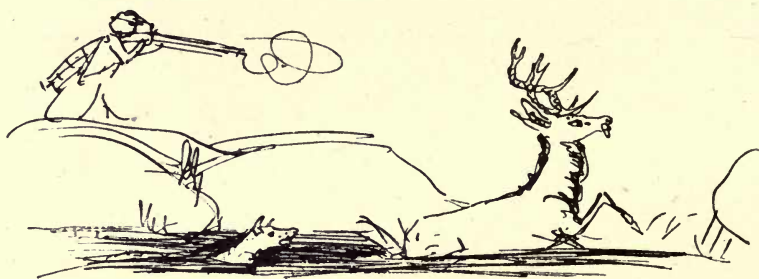
priety that he should hunt the very ground over which I intended to beat homewards.

On second thoughts, I fancied that he had fired off his gun to warn me of his approach; but, just as I was passing these things over in my head, I saw a stag of good size come in view from the direction in which I had heard the shots. Down I dropped instantly behind a rock, as the deer was coming straight towards me. As he approached, I saw that the poor beast was hard hit. One of his forelegs was broken, and swinging about in a miserable manner, and he had also one of his horns broken off a few inches above his head; altogether he seemed in a most pitiable state. Before he came within two hundred yards of me he turned off and I watched him as he scrambled along on three legs painfully and slowly, stopping frequently to look back, or to smell at the blood that was trickling down his sides. I could plainly see that he was also struck somewhere about the middle of his body, as well as on the horn and leg, and was now bleeding fast.

It then occurred to me that Donald had fallen in with a lame stag, and had thought it best to do what he could towards killing him with my gun. Bullets he always took with him by my orders. The stag continued his painful march, and I would have given much to have been within reach to put an end to the poor brute's misery. He twice lay down on a grassy spot amongst the rocks, having first looked anxiously and fearfully round him; but seemingly the attitude of lying was more painful to him than moving slowly on. I remembered then a theory of Donald's, that a deer never lies down when shot through the liver, but continues moving, or at any rate standing, till he dies. How far this opinion was correct I never had a good opportunity of proving. The deer before me, having found that lying down gave him no relief, continued moving, but still slowly and with evident difficulty. Once he stopped and stood in a pitiful attitude, trembling all over, and moving his head up and down as if oppressed with deadly sickness. After this he seemed to recover slightly, and, standing erect, gazed with care and anxiety

in every direction ; then, as if determined to make one more effort for his life, set off in a broken trot.

He had been winding about amongst the rocks all the time I had been watching him, seldom more than two hundred yards from me, and sometimes so near that I was half tempted to try a shot at him ; but I was always in hopes of getting within surer range, and did not fire. He now trotted off about three hundred yards, where there was a small black pool of water. Into this he went ; it did not at first reach higher than his knees. Just then Donald appeared in view, coming slowly and cautiously over the hill, and leading a pointer in a string. I saw that the dog was tracking the deer. It was a large powerful dog, of great size and strength—one of the finest, if not quite the finest built dog of



the kind that I had ever possessed or seen. Having been at the death of one or two deer, he had taken a mighty fancy to the scent of a bleeding stag, and tracked true and keenly. I sat quiet to watch him and the old Highlander, as they came slowly but surely on the track, with both their noses to the ground ; Donald hunting low, in order to be sure that the dog was still right, which he could tell pretty well by the occasional spots of blood on the gray stones, though the ground was too hard most of the way to show the mark of the foot. Now and then they seemed quite thrown out for a minute or so ; this I saw was generally occasioned by Donald's want of judgment. The dog, though he strained on the string, kept the track wonderfully well in every turn. The poor object of their chase, when he first saw

his enemies appear, gave a sudden start, and seemed inclined to make off; but on second thoughts he stopped short again, and, lowering his head and neck, crouched in the water, as if trusting to the surrounding rocks for concealment; and there the poor animal remained, with stooping horns, perfectly motionless, but evidently with every nerve and sense on the alert, listening for the nearer approach of his enemies. For my own part, I became quite interested in watching Donald and the dog; I knew that the stag was safely ours, as he could not leave the pool without coming into full view, and having to depend on his speed for safety, which in his enfeebled state was the last thing he would like to do. Donald looked anxiously round him sometimes, as if he hoped to see me, and as if he expected to hear my rifle every moment, since he was well aware that our time of meeting was past, and that I was pretty sure not to be far off.

When he came near the "Devil's Stone" he checked the dog, and came to a determined halt, hesitating whether to continue tracking the stag or to wait for my appearance and assistance; he took a long look, too, at the country far beyond where the animal really was. It was amusing to see the old fellow, as he sat within eighty yards of me, perfectly unconscious that the stag was so near him, and that I was still nearer. The whole thing, too, showed the great necessity of always having a good tracking dog out when deer-stalking; for here was a mortally-struck stag lying concealed where a dozen men might have passed within a few yards without seeing him. I thought it time to finish the business, and gave a low whistle to warn Donald of my neighbourhood before I stirred, as I thought it not at all unlikely that he would fire blindly at the first moving thing he saw amongst the rocks in his present excited state. He started and stared round him. I saw that the deer only crouched the lower, and would not move; so whistling again, I stood up. "The Lord keep us, sir, but you flegged me just awful," said Donald. "But did your honour see a stag come this way?" I told him that I had, and that he had passed on; but I did not say how far he had gone. The old man was annoyed in no slight degree at the

information ; and on my questioning him how he had got at the deer, etc., he told me that, as he came to me, he had seen a crippled stag coming slowly over the ground exactly towards him ; and that having stooped down and loaded the gun he carried as quickly as he could, he had waited till the stag passed within twenty yards of him ; that he then fired both barrels, one at his head and neck ; that one ball had broken off a portion of the deer's horn, while the other had passed through his body, tumbling him over ; but that he had quickly recovered and made off in my direction, and was probably now in the burn over the next hill. " But you are aye smiling, sir ; and I ken weel that you've seen more of the brute than you tell me." I told the old man exactly where he was ; and having made him quite understand the very rock he was behind, I gave him the rifle to finish the work he had commenced, while I sat down with the two dogs in full view of the pool, in order to keep the attention of the stag occupied.

" Now then, Donald, take care ; don't be in a hurry, and hit him on the heart or the head."

" No fear, no fear ; if I put out," said Donald, " ye needna mind, the beast is as gude as killed already."

Then taking a prodigious spoonful of snuff to clear his brain, and divesting himself of his gamebag and other encumbrances, he set off. He reached a mound within thirty yards of the stag, and lying flat on his stomach, with his rifle resting on the bank, he aimed long and steadily ; then, with sundry kicks and contortions, screwing himself into an attitude that pleased him more, he took another aim, and then a good strong pull at the trigger—but in vain, as he had not cocked the rifle. Without taking it off the rest over the bank, he pulled back the hammer and fired instantly, missing the stag entirely. Donald was too astonished to move ; but not so the stag, who jumped up and made off—going, however, so stiffly and lamely that I saw the dogs must bring him to immediately. So I let them go, and in a very short time they had the poor beast on the ground, and were both fixed on him like leeches, the bull-dog on his throat and the pointer worrying at his shoulder.

"Bravo, Donald!—well missed!" I could not help calling out as I passed him, running as hard as I could to help the dogs. The old man was not long in joining me; and the dogs were soon got off. The stag was bled, and then examined all over to see where he had been struck.

"'Deed, sir," said Donald, pointing to the rifle, "she is as gleg and kittle to handle as——"

Here he paused as if at a dead loss for a simile; which I was obliged to help him to at last by suggesting, "As your own wife, Donald." At which he indulged in a low inward chuckle and a pinch of snuff, without, however, denying the "soft impeachment."

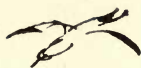
On looking at the stag, we found that he had evidently been very lately shot at, and that one of his forelegs was broken above the knee—the bone smashed entirely, and the leg hanging on by the skin, which would have soon worn through; the animal, having lost the encumbrance of the broken limb, would soon, if left in quiet, have entirely recovered. We prepared our game for being "left till called for," and sat down to our luncheon. My account to Donald of the death of my other stag was interrupted by a most desperate battle between the dogs, who had fallen out over the dead body; and being pretty well matched in size and courage, we had great difficulty in reducing them to order and compelling them to keep the peace.

I had a pleasant though not very bloody afternoon's shooting going home, killing seven brace of wild-flying grouse, a mallard, and two blackcocks. The night had set in before we were half way through the woods in which the last two or three miles of our road lay; we could hear numberless owls hooting and calling on the tops of old larch trees. Everything else was as still as death.

"'Deed, sir, that's no' canny!" exclaimed my companion, as an owl with peculiar vigour of lungs uttered his wild cry close to us, and then, flitting past our faces, alighted on the opposite side of the avenue we were walking along, and recommenced his song of bad omen. "If it wasn't so dark, I'd empty the

gun into his ugly craig." However, as it *was* so dark, the owl escaped being sacrificed, to Donald's dislike this time; and we soon reached the house, where the comforts of my own dressing-room were by no means unacceptable after so long an absence from razor, brushes, etc.





INVERERNE.

1846.

GROUSE disease is attributed to tapeworm. I am more inclined to think that the actual disease is an affection of the liver, and that the birds attacked by this liver disease are subject to tapeworm frequently, but far from invariably, as on opening the dead birds that showed symptoms of the illness, we always found the liver to be much diseased, but seldom, very seldom, found any mark of tapeworm.

There is striking peculiarity in the sick birds. Their breast feathers become of a dull reddish brown, quite different from the colour of a healthy bird, and the plumage altogether is not so bright or glossy as that of a healthy grouse.

I never observed so rich a bloom on the heather. As the dogs hunted, they were accompanied by a cloud of dust, or rather pollen from the flowers, which very much spoilt their scent. The perfume of the heather, like that of honey, was quite striking as we walked over the hills.

A great many blue or mountain hares breed on these hills owing to the destruction of the vermin. They are very annoying to dogs who are not well broken from running hares, owing to their manner of stopping and reconnoitring their enemy, sitting upon their hind quarters at a short distance from the dogs, and so tempting them to chase.

On the 9th of September I shot two wigeons as they passed over my head flying inland in the evening. These birds generally come about the middle of October. The flock I saw consisted of eight or nine, and I am inclined to think had been bred in the country, though their doing so is a very rare occurrence.

On the 18th of the month I killed a jacksnipe. These birds also come usually near the end of October. They never breed in this country. There had been no severe weather to drive them here earlier than usual. I killed some more jacksnipe during the month. The woodcock was apparently a bird bred in the country.

Both hawks* were merlins; the smallest of the two scarcely bigger than a blackbird.

The land-rails seldom are seen here after July or August. They seem to leave us as soon as their young can accompany them, and it is very rare to find them after the corn is cut. I killed one in some rough ground quite away from their usual haunts.

Rabbits, hares, and also wood-pigeons continue to breed later this year than usual, owing to the fineness of the season. Green-finches also breed till the end of the month.

Whitethroats and swallows have entirely disappeared before the end of the month, as also swifts, martins, cuckoo, &c.

A wheatear or two are seen till the beginning of October, but very few.

Peewits collect in great numbers near the shore, also golden plovers. Great flocks of young gulls of all kinds are seen.

On the 3rd of October I saw a wood-pigeon's nest with small young ones in it. A day or two afterwards, however, both the young birds were dead.

* [These hawks had been shot a few days earlier.—ED.]



I killed a land-rail on the 3rd, the latest period at which I ever saw them here. It was the fattest bird that I ever saw. Some quails, three or four, were killed at Duffus early in the month. I had seen and heard them here in the month of May, so that they probably breed here.

A weasel (a very small one) killed a large hen that was sitting in a hedge close to the house.

On the 12th of this month I saw several large flocks of wild geese. They were flying towards the south-east. There was a considerable quantity of snow covering the higher hills and mountains in Ross-shire about the 11th and 12th.

The wigeons were very numerous also, the large flocks appearing to have come about the 9th and 10th. More of the mallard duck than usual in the bag. The latter birds fly every evening to feed in the stubbles. They fix upon a field where there is much grain left on the ground, and but little grass or weeds to cover the scattered grains, and come regularly to it soon after sunset. They have some means of communicating with each other, as their numbers increase on a good field every night, as if those who had already found it invited their friends to the feast.

Redshanks very numerous on the shore.

After a flood in the river, numbers of snipe always come down for a day or two to feed about the mud left by the water. Flocks of peewits on the 18th (later than usual).

I shot a crossbill on the 10th, out of a small company of five or six.

Water-ouzel come to the burns near the sea about the beginning of October. The same stones are occupied year after year by these birds.

On the 18th, flocks of starlings.

I shot a grey gull, 5 ft. $11\frac{1}{2}$ in. between the tips of the wings.

In the beginning of October the rats return to the houses from the fields and ditches.

Roe in good condition, and with their winter coat, about the second week in October.

Spawning trout get into all the small ditches wherever they find running water.

Hen-harriers and other hawks come down and hunt the low grounds in October.

Redwings arrive in middle of October. Fieldfares about the last week of the month.

Grouse in October and September feed very much on the stubble fields, and are snared and trapped in great numbers by the shepherds and others who have small oat fields far up in the hills. They frequently leave some of the sheaves on the ground for the express purpose of catching the grouse. The usual manner is with horsehair nooses. They put a great number of these snares on each sheaf of corn, and catch dozens of grouse in a morning.

October 27th.—The golden plover assemble morning and evening in immense flocks on the gravel banks along the edge of the river.

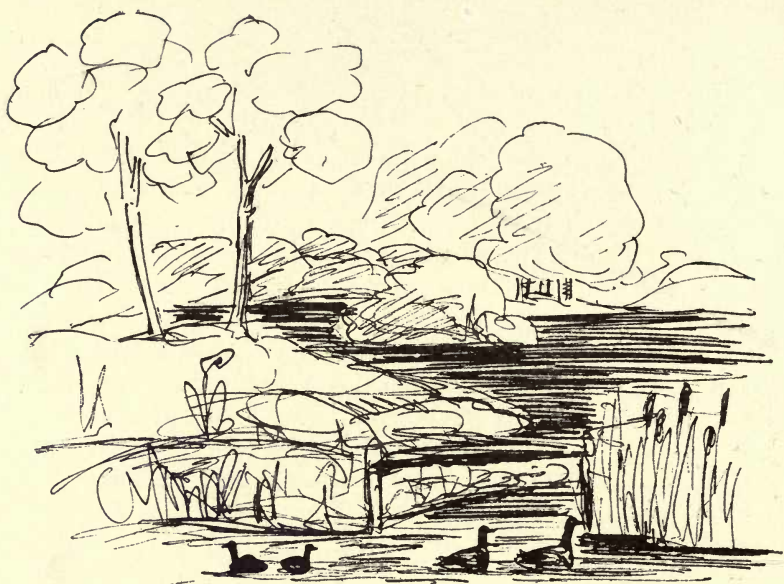
After a flood in the river a great many snipe come down to feed about the mud left after the water has subsided.

I shot a wood-pigeon with its crop entirely full of well-ripened acorns. As this food does not ripen here in any quantity, I was much surprised at the circumstance, the more so as it was a young bird, and the spot where I killed it was at the distance of some miles from any oak tree. In England I have frequently observed that the wild ducks fly to considerable distances at night time to feed on the acorns that drop from oak trees standing singly in the fields.

About the middle of October the roe have lost their red summer coat and have put on their beautiful mouse-coloured winter covering, though the hair has not yet acquired its full length. These animals are very fond of feeding in the clover fields, nibbling at the second growth that comes up now. As the leaves are now dropping off the birch and larch, the roe leave these woods now and betake themselves to the fir woods, where they remain till the spring affords them shelter again in the verdurous woods by the return of the leaf.

The proceedings of the field mouse (*mus. sylvaticus*) are now very interesting. These pretty little animals are at this season very busy in digging out and arranging their holes in the stubble fields. They have already laid up their stores of grain, acorns, nuts, and even cherry stones. Sometimes four or five mice are found in one hole; almost invariably at this season, if any mice are in a hole, the aperture is completely closed, which they can only do from within, thus shutting themselves up from the cold winds. The quantity of earth that they excavate with their tiny paws is quite astonishing, making a goodly heap in a single night. My gardener encourages the boys to destroy these mice, and they turn them out of their holes by pouring a pailful of water into the hole, when the poor little animals are obliged to leave their tenement.





NOVEMBER.

November 1st.—A small tomtit has taken to living in the house, frequenting the drawing-room and an adjoining parlour. The little fellow hops about without the smallest fear, searching for and eating the house flies and other insects. He seems to principally feed on the larger house flies, prying into every crevice about the shutters and window curtains after these insects, which collect now in great numbers, and being in a sleepy condition are easily caught by this active devourer. The children also put down crumbs on the table where I am writing, which he picks up close to me, looking up into my face without the least apparent fear.

November 6th.—Peewits still come inland in the dusk. I saw to-day a flock of snow buntings, the first I have seen this year, two or three very white ones amongst the flock, which is unusual at this season of the year. I flushed several brace of jacksnipes in a small spot of rushes. There is a very striking difference in the colour of the legs of different birds of the kind,

some having yellowish-green legs and some blue-coloured legs. The latter appear to be the old birds.

The thrushes feed in great numbers now in the turnip fields.

As soon as the wheat is sown, birds of all kinds flock on it in great numbers—rooks, wood-pigeons, gulls, and small birds, particularly greenfinches. The flocks of the latter seem to consist almost wholly of cock birds.

November 8th.—By the edge of the river are tracks of four otters, two old ones and two young ones. They are evidently newly arrived, and will probably remain feeding about the mouth of the river till a flood drives them away. There are two or three small hillocks the size of molehills near the river, to which the otters invariably resort; and it seems that whenever an otter arrives in that part of the river, however great a stranger he may be, or however long an interval may have elapsed since an otter has visited the hillock, the newcomer goes out of the water to examine the place as if the animal wished to judge by the scenery or staleness of the marks on it what likelihood there may be of any other otters being in the neighbourhood.

Shy as the otter is, and easily alarmed in his ordinary pursuits, no animal shows more courage and determination in defending its young, or more attachment to its mate or companion. If a young otter is taken hold of, the mother, on hearing its cry of distress, at once puts off all her timidity and rushes to the rescue of her curious looking progeny. I have known a man to be so determinedly attacked by a female otter, that he was obliged, in self-defence, to drop the young one that he was carrying off. When an otter is caught in a trap, all its companions that may be within hearing of its struggles to escape immediately repair to the spot and try to assist the captive in escaping.

During the daytime the otter lies quietly in some concealed spot, either in a hole excavated under some overhanging bank or root of a tree, or in some hollow place amongst a cairn of stone; occasionally, however, when surprised by the light of day in a situation where he deems it imprudent to continue his course towards the usual hiding-place, the otter will lie up for the day

in some very unexpected place, crawling quietly into some convenient drain, or choosing a dry place in a clump of rushes, and there he will lie during the whole day, till the gloom of evening enables him to continue his journeying, or to commence fishing again. I remember an instance of a groom in Hampshire being startled by an otter jumping from under his wheelbarrow, which he had left leaning against the stable wall close to a stream. Into this the otter had crawled in the morning, and there he would probably have remained till evening had not the man, having occasion for the barrow, dislodged him by turning it over.

Though the otter is naturally wholly piscivorous, on emergency he will eat flesh or fowl, and is occasionally caught in traps baited with a pigeon, a piece of rabbit, or whatever else the gamekeeper may make use of in catching other vermin. The trap that holds an otter must, however, have both a powerful spring and be well chained to a peg, with a swivel or two on the chain to prevent the animal breaking it by dint of twisting.

In hunting down the course of a river during the night time, in descending the stream the otter always keeps the water, gliding, in his quiet ghostlike manner, down the deep pools, making scarcely a ripple as he floats down, sometimes diving and, indeed, rarely showing much of his head above the surface, excepting when to listen to some distant sound, or to gaze at some doubtful object, he suddenly rises half his length perpendicularly out of the water. In passing the fords he wades down the shallowest place, or if the stream is there very rapid, he comes out of the water and follows the bank of the river, moving along in a curious leaping manner. When in pursuit of fish, the otter seems, as far as can be observed, to try to get below his prey in order to seize it by the throat. The quickness of his movements in the water, as well as the little disturbance he makes, are quite wonderful, gliding swiftly and noiselessly as an arrow from a bow. In ascending the stream, to return homewards to his day quarters, he leaves the water wherever the current is at all strong, and, indeed, he seems to travel at this time almost as much by land as by water.

November 11th.—The snowflakes [bunting] seem to be constantly arriving from the north in considerable flights. During the two days of damp fog that have occurred, the partridges entirely leave the turnip fields and remain all day on the sand-banks and other dry places near the river.

November 12th.—Great flocks of snowflakes on the hills, also immense numbers of greenfinches in the corn-yards. A small flock of redpolls. I found more snipe than usual on that ground. The congregating of these different birds, and the cold raw mists that have now lasted three days, seem as if snow was coming. Partridges are quite unapproachable just now. The grass and every leaf is so saturated with wet that these birds, never squatting flat on the ground, are in a state of constant watchfulness. The water-ouzel sings all day now, sometimes sitting on a stone, and at other times floating with half-open wings on the surface of the pools.

The burns are full of spawning trout. In the shallows they can be seen ploughing up the gravel with their noses, in order to make beds for their spawn.

November 13th.—The partridges are collected in flocks like grouse. Saw a great number of fieldfares and redwings.

Many tracks of foxes and otter by the edge of the river.

November 14th.—Immense flocks of fieldfares and redwings in every new-sown wheat field. Great numbers of wood-pigeons. The sea-gulls feed indiscriminately on worms, snails, and grain. Partridges just now are shifting their ground, and fresh coveys appear everywhere. They leave the turnip fields and remain all day on heather or sandy ground.

November 24th.—I saw two peewits to-day. I remark this, wishing to keep note of the latest day on which I see any of these birds.

November 26th.—Saw to-day five swans. They were flying at the height of nine or ten feet from the ground towards the bay. They were at the time coming from the south, probably from Lochindorb, where these birds occasionally rest for a day or so, but never remain longer, as that loch is not adapted for their feeding.

The wind, which was blowing strongly from the north, obliged them to fly so low. After alighting in the bay for about half an hour they rose and flew (as they invariably do for a short time) to windward, then turning they winged their way rapidly with the wind in the direction of the Loch of Spynie, which is a favourite resting-place, being shallow and abounding in the grass on which they feed.

S—— tells me that there are two kinds of wild swans frequenting this country—one perfectly white and with their feet entirely black, the other kind having the lower parts of a cream colour, and their feet mottled with brown and black. He also says that the latter kind are larger than the former.

Hares have some peculiar habits which, from the animal itself being so common, are not often remarked, as no one looks on a hare as anything more than an article of food, whereas it is as interesting and beautiful a creature as exists. One peculiarity is the great love that hares have for taking up their quarters near houses. I find invariably a hare or two close to the houses of the town, and also close to the different cottages on my ground.

I remember once sleeping at a shepherd's house on the hills. During almost all the night the dogs of the place were barking and yelping at my deerhound, entirely preventing me from sleeping. I was the first person up, and on going to the back of the house to look at the morning sun, I started a hare that had made her form up against the turf wall of the cottage undeterred by the constant noise that had gone on during all the night. Similar instances have often fallen under my observation. I found a hare sitting the other day within five feet of where I was standing, and in a very open place. I wanted to show her to one of my children, who was riding four or five hundred yards from the spot, so I stood still and sent a man to call the boy. In the meantime I had to call loudly at and rate my dogs, four of which were hunting about the place. Seeing with their quick and peculiar instinct that I saw something, the dogs became very eager, and it required a great deal of calling at to keep them quiet and make them lie for four or five minutes. When the child came I had to point the hare out to him. The poor little animal, notwith-

standing all this noise, did not move so much as one of her paws, but remained perfectly motionless, with her eye fixed on mine. The moment I took my eye off her (which I had not done all this time) she darted off, and springing through the only spot free from her numerous enemies, she was over the brow of a hill in two strides.

A hare will allow a person to pass within a yard or two of her when sitting, as long as the man's direction does not seem likely to lead him exactly over her, and as long as she fancies she is unobserved. In cover, hares steal away at some distance off much more frequently than they do in an open place; but different hares act very differently in this respect in the same ground and on the same days, some lying close and others stealing away wildly with no apparent reason.

November 26th.—Saw five wild swans.

November 27th.—Several flocks of swans seen passing to the bay. It is an invariable fact that all the flocks of swans, when they first come, are seen arriving from the southwards, although we well know that they must visit this country from the north. It appears to me that they must alight on some of the lochs on Strathspey, or in that district, and that they turn northwards to Findhorn Bay, from where they distribute themselves amongst the lakes where they feed, such as Lochlee, the Loch of Spynie, etc. Judging from the sudden appearance of these birds, I have no doubt that we shall have a storm of snow in a day or two.

November 28th.—The ground, as I anticipated from seeing the swans, is covered with snow, deeper than I ever saw it at this season. No swans to be seen in the bay, but an infinity of wild ducks, etc. Shot several mallards and one dun diver (*mergus castor linneus*). This bird is much smaller than the female goosander (for which it is sometimes taken), though evidently quite full grown and well plumaged—the cream colour of the breast, and peculiarly clean and beautiful, and the curiously serrated bill of a bright red colour. It brought up twenty-five of the small fish we called sticklebacks and a small eel, all quite recently caught. The edges of the bill are so formed that a fish or other slippery prey easily goes into his mouth, but owing

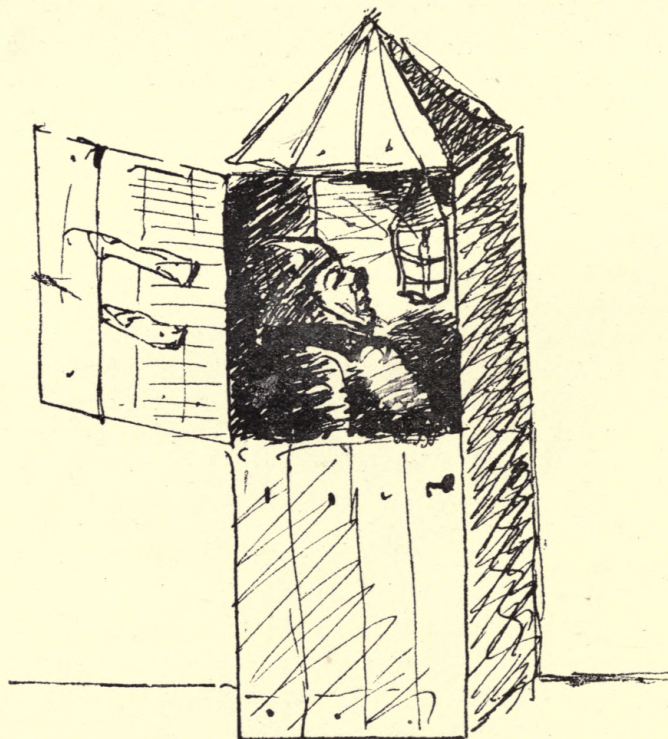
to the teeth all sloping inwards, they act like the barb of a hook, and prevent anything that has once entered from escaping. *Facilis descensus Averni, sed revocare gradum*, etc., so would say the small fish.

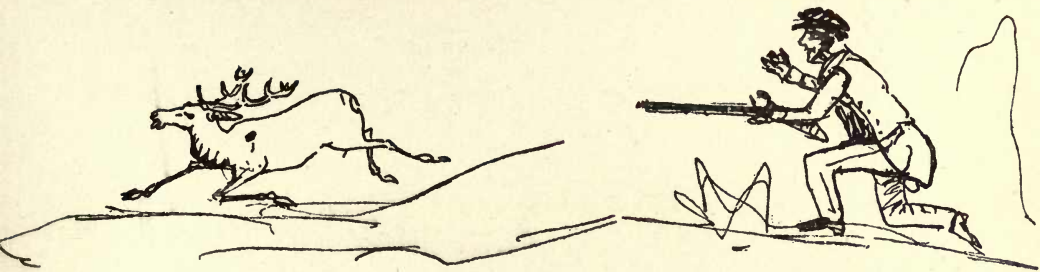
Bewick describes this bird as 27 in. long and weighing 3 lbs. I find it 20 in. long and weighing [?] lbs.

He has evidently measured a female goosander instead of a dun diver, which latter bird is always much smaller than the former. The bird killed to-day had about it all the unmistakable appearance of a mature, well-grown bird of its kind.

Blackbirds and thrushes very busy under the garden walls in search of snails, etc.

The field mice have the entrances to all their holes stopped up this cold weather.





DECEMBER.

Large flocks of golden plovers both on the sands and in the fields, and on the hills. They appear to rest on the heather during the high tides, when the sands and banks are covered in the bay. As the tide recedes, they return to the sands. I, however, consider both these birds and the peewits as almost, if not wholly, night feeding birds. They evidently feed all night in the fields (where there is not much frost), and on the shore when the earth is frozen.

December 3rd.—After two days of snow, a fresh north-west wind, which blows away and melts all the snow near the sea. The common wild ducks during the day were flying to and fro from the sea to the stubble fields. These birds are always very anxious to take to the fields on the first disappearance of frost and snow; as, during the time that the ground is hard with frost or covered with snow, they cannot feed on the corn, the grass, or the worms and insects on which they feed.

A singular incident happened to me to-day in shooting at a mallard. The bird flew away apparently not injured. I happened to be watching him, and as he just went out of sight over a hill at the distance of, at least, a quarter of a mile, I fancied that I saw the bird show the white feather below his wing, as if he had tumbled down in his flight. On going up to the place, I found him on the ground with his wing broken close to the body. The bird had, at first, flown with the wind, and then flew well enough, but after battling against the wind for a few hundred yards, the bone (which must have been injured by the shot) broke in two.

My retriever brought me a water-rail (*rallus aquaticus*), which he had caught amongst some rushes, the little bird not being injured. I took it home to show to my children, and then turned it loose again in a running stream, where it bustled away quite at its ease, and seemingly indifferent to the circumstance (rather a singular one in the history of its life) of having been an hour or two in my shooting coat pocket. I was struck with the courage of the little fellow when the dog brought him. He fought away with both feet and bill, striking not only the dog's face, but my hand when I took hold of him, and when I put my hand into my pocket where he was, he flew at my fingers, pecking at them with all his strength. I had occasion, on another day, to remark the courage of a water-rail. One rose from a ditch where the ground was covered with snow. As I did not fire at him, he flew for a hundred yards, and pitched on the snow in the adjoining field, and immediately set off to return to the water from which he had been flushed. A large black-backed gull, seeing the little black bird on the snow, made a dart at it to carry it off; but the little rail immediately flung himself on his back, and whenever the gull flew at him, he struck out manfully with bill and claws, springing up and pulling feathers out of his gigantic enemy, and keeping him off. Afraid, however, that the little rail would be killed, I went and drove away the gull, and allowed him to run back to the water.

The water-rail is, at all times, a rare and solitary bird in this country. I have but rarely seen them, although I am constantly in the habit of hunting for snipe, etc., in the rushy places and ditches where the rails do frequent when here. Their tracks, too, are but rarely seen in the snow, although a rail evidently travels a great distance on foot, passing over large open fields from one ditch to another. I have sometimes traced them in the snow for long distances.

I hear the swans now during the moonlight nights calling in the bay, and the wigeons keep up a constant whistling, varied sometimes by a low croaking quack. The latter birds feed wholly on grass and grassy weeds, coming regularly on the ebb of

the tide to graze on the grassy banks that are left bare. I rarely see them take to the fields. I saw to-day three long-tailed ducks (*anas glacialis*) in the burn.

December 11th.—Severe snowstorm. Wind N.-E. Wigeon are driven to the open ditches, and are very tame. The long-tailed ducks are also in every open pool and ditch, and so tame that they will rather dive than fly, however near I approach.

December 12th and 13th.—The snipe begin to come in great numbers to every open ditch, but are very wild in consequence of all their cover being beaten down by the snow, which makes them unable to conceal themselves.

December 14th and 15th.—The redwings, thrushes, linnets, and other small birds become very tame and distressed for want of food. A tawny bunting* (a rare bird here) came into the house. The rooks do great mischief to the corn stacks, tearing out the straw and carrying off the corn. Along every ditch side and drain I see the tracks of weasels. These little animals seem to travel an astonishing distance, hunting carefully every furze bush and other place which might conceal any prey. A specimen of the little auk was killed by a man in a ditch leading into the sea. The river is quite choked up at the end by the accumulation of frozen snow and ice, and the whole bay (excepting a small part near Findhorn) is covered with masses of ice and snow.

December 19th.—The frost and snow commence to go. There is still, however, a considerable depth in sheltered places, which are not reached by the wind. Nothing melts snow so quickly as wind. The snipe have collected in great numbers about every unfrozen place, but from the grass and rushes being covered with snow, they are very wild. The partridges and hares, from the same reason, are quite unapproachable. Rabbits burrow under the snow. During the first two days of snow, rabbits and hares appear to move very little. Fieldfares and redwings, though weak and tame, do not become lean for the first week, but seem to find sufficient food about the springs and shore to keep them in good order.

* [Probably a young snow bunting.—ED.]

I was much struck by the strength displayed by rooks in digging up the snow and frozen ground in search of the fresh-sown wheat, large spaces of the fields appearing as if rooted up by pigs.

Wood-pigeons destroy turnips (particularly Swedish turnips) during snow, by digging into them in a manner which seems quite beyond the strength of their bills.

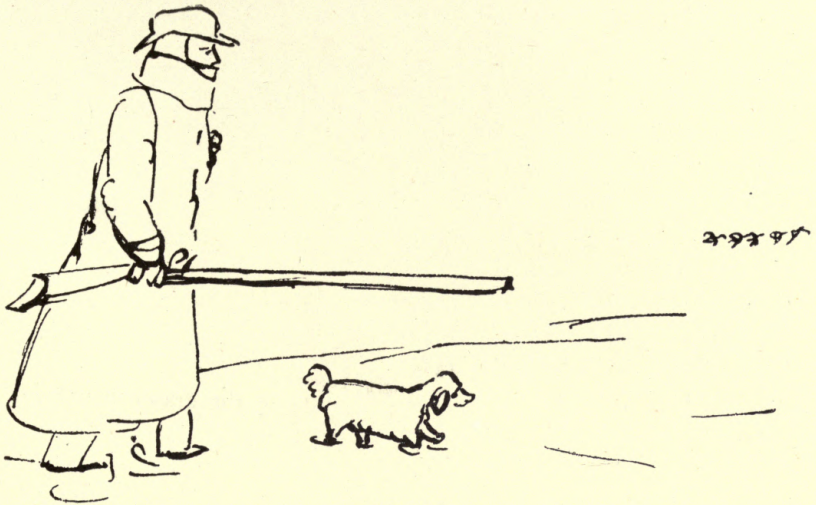
Robins are very carnivorous, devouring raw meat most voraciously. So do tomtits.

The water-ouzes seem to enjoy this cold weather, flitting about and warbling with great appearance of delight.

Weasels and stoats wander to great distances in snow, particularly along the sides of water.

December 21st.—Immense flocks of wigeon, mallards, teal, coots, and other waterfowl. Spynie is the best loch in the north of Scotland for wildfowl, and a great resort of swans, etc. Towards evening the mallards and wigeon flew backwards and forwards about the edges and to the few ditches and streams that were not snowed over or covered with ice.





1847.

JANUARY.

January 14th, 1847.—Neither wigeon nor teal are yet in full plumage. Occasionally I kill a drake wigeon in full feather, but the generality of them are still much mottled with brown. There is a very great difference in the size of the drake and duck wigeon.

A great number of the bird called the little auk are found, being dead along the shore.

The wood-pigeons now feed entirely on the turnip leaves. Sometimes they dig at a root that has been commenced on by a rabbit or hare, but I do not think that they are the first to break the skin of a turnip.

I see a great number of the nests of the garden spider, full of eggs, about old railings, the garden walls, etc., and the tit-mice seem to feed much on them.

The greenfinches are in immense flocks, and begin to sing when collected on the trees. The corn-bunting and the yellow-hammer collect in flocks on the tops of the trees and sing their shrill, but not unpleasant note.

A weasel had eaten a great many of the mice caught in the

boys' traps, and was at last caught itself in a rat trap. I don't know a more courageous little animal than the weasel. When overtaken by a dog it flies directly at the dog's head and bites furiously. I also shot a beautiful milk-white stoat that came out of a rabbit hole where I was ferreting.

January 15th.—The wigeon now begin to feed very constantly and quietly on the grassy banks and islands about the bay, grazing along like tame geese in close flocks. Partridges during the hard frost feed on clover very much. In this country they never get lean, apparently requiring very little food. In the snow they are unapproachable, though I remember once, when a boy at school, killing nearly a whole covey in the snow. I was lying hid, and a covey of partridges came within shot of the old flint gun that I had borrowed for the occasion, so I shot at them, killing three. Seeing that the rest of the covey did not move away, but after looking up collected round their dead companions, I fired again (having reloaded), killing one or two more. Still keeping concealed, I again loaded and got another shot, and might have killed them to the last had not the school-fellow who was with me raised himself, when the birds immediately flew away; that is, the few that remained alive flew away. Although I cannot plead guilty to ever having tried the same plan again, I have been told that these birds never fly off from the report of the gun till they see the shooter.

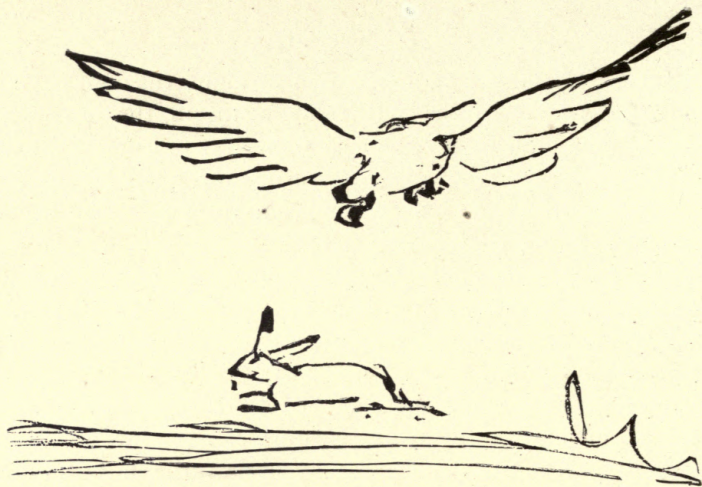
Wigeon in large flocks, and feeding all day on the grass banks very greedily.

I see that the mallard duck feeds now very much in the last year's potato fields. In the crop of one that I opened I found a great quantity of potatoes, oats, and shrimps. I never observed them feed on potatoes till this year. I fancy that they are attracted by the vast quantity of half-rotten potatoes left in the fields owing to the failure of that crop this season. My own ducks appeared very fond of feeding on the diseased and half-rotten potatoes that were put in a heap and covered slightly over with mould, the ducks grubbing and digging them up to a considerable depth.

January 29th.—A harder frost last night than we have had during the whole winter, but rainy again in the daytime. I put up a water-rail to-day amongst some furze bushes quite away from any water. I found the remains of a little auk some distance up the river, half-a-mile from the sea. The flocks of greenfinches seem to increase daily. The redshank commences to change his note, uttering the peculiar whistle which they make in the spring. The long-tail ducks were particularly noisy in the bay to-day when the tide was coming in. Their cry is very musical, and unlike that of any other bird. It may resemble the bugle note of the wild swan slightly. The rooks do much injury to the turnips, boring into them with their sharp and strong bills. The boys at the farm near this have two trout, about six inches in length, in the wooden trough out of which their horses drink. The fish seem quite lively and well, though they have lived in the trough since August last. When the fresh water is pumped in for the horses, they dart up to the place where it falls into the trough, and seem to enjoy it very much without the least symptom of shyness.

January 30th.—The jacksnipe, which have disappeared for a long time, appear again. I killed a brace to-day. The common hares turn very grey in this country about now. Those killed in woods do not appear to turn so grey as those killed in open ground. Immense flights of fieldfares and redwings. (Wind N.E.)





FEBRUARY.

February 1st.—Ground quite covered with snow, and a great quantity of frozen ice and snow floating in the bay, which quite prevents the wild ducks and wigeon from coming near the shore. The river, too, is full of floating snow and ice. I never saw so many wigeon as are just now on this coast. Late in the evening I heard a peewit call as the bird rose from a field, when it was too dark to distinguish it. The drake wigeon are now in full plumage.

February 2nd.—Both rooks and wood-pigeons must commit great damage on the wheat and the turnips. The former is only attacked by the rooks, the wood-pigeons' bills not being hard enough to dig into the frozen ground. I shot a large stoat to-day only partially white, although two or three that I had killed lately (and even some weeks back) had been as pure a white as snow. The stoat, when fully changed, is the whitest animal that I know. Whether the one killed to-day is a young animal I cannot tell, but certainly it was a peculiarly large one.

The collie dogs in this country kill a great number of hares and rabbits. I constantly find marks in the snow of their having done so.

February 9th.—Very severe frost, much snow and drift. The fieldfares in great numbers on the Swedish turnips, and I was much astonished at the great damage done by them to the roots. I watched some of the birds digging at the turnips with their bills and chipping and scooping out great pieces, in this manner destroying half the crop at least by letting the frost into the roots. The fieldfares themselves (some of them being shot) had so strong a smell of turnip that they could not be cooked, being perfectly unfit to eat from the rankness of their smell, which resembled that of rotten turnips; otherwise the birds were not only in good condition, but quite fat.

The whole bay and all the streams and springs were so filled up with drift snow and ice that there was not a single duck of any sort to be seen, with the exception of one morillon, who had found out about six feet square of open water in the burn. On being flushed from this he flew a long distance up the stream in search of some other opening, but, not finding any, came back and plumped down into the same place close to me, and there I left him.

I never saw the low country here in such a state with snow since I have lived here. Saw a flock of larks, which (this winter) is a rare sight.

February 10th.—Deep snow. In tracking rabbits on the muir, observed that several of them had merely gone fifty yards from their seat under a furze bush, and after eating the shoots off the nearest bush, had returned to the same place.

February 12th.—I find many wood-pigeons that I kill have the upper part of their bills and their feet covered with warty excrescences, especially the later young birds of this season. Those who have this disease are generally weak and thin.

February 15th.—Shot ducks in Loch of Spynie. There are immense numbers of mallard and wigeon on the loch and some pochards, pintail ducks, morillons, and teal. We killed a female duck of a kind quite unknown to us—a beautiful shaped bird with plain brown plumage like that of a duck teal, but with every feather marked with a shell or scale pattern, and about the size of a hen wigeon. I am inclined to think that it is a female

garganey (*anas querquedula*). Besides these birds, there were immense flocks of coots and numbers of moorhens, &c. One swan only is at present on the loch, which, from its half-frozen state, is not in good condition for wildfowl. In the dusk we took up position near some potato fields, where the potatoes had not been raised in consequence of the disease in the plant. Here we killed several mallards and ducks. These birds feed greedily on the half-rotten potatoes.

February 16th.—Shot wildfowl again at the lake. There seems to be an immense proportion of drakes amongst the wigeon. These birds have begun to pair, and flew about towards evening in pairs. We placed ourselves this evening at dusk in the line of flight taken by the wigeon from the lake to their feeding-places on the grass fields bordering the water's edge. At dusk the wigeon flew as fast as the flocks could succeed each other, sometimes in small companies, sometimes in pairs. They utter a peculiar whistle when on wing, different to their whistle when feeding or swimming. I shot five myself as they passed—all drakes. Out of ten wigeon which we killed this evening only one was a duck.

The rooks begin to collect in the ash trees at Gordonstown, where they breed, making a great noise in the morning. I also heard the spring cry of the kestrel hawk.

[February 20th.—Wild cats are brindled grey, and I have observed that domestic cats of that colour are more inclined to take to the woods and hunt for themselves than others. When they do so, they grow very large and are most destructive to game of all kinds.

A large cat of this colour found out some tame rabbits belonging to my boys and killed several of them. At last we saw him come out of a hole where some white rabbits were breeding, and he was shot. The brute had evidently been living on them for some time. I first discovered that he was in the hole by the old rabbits showing alarm and watching the mouth of the hole with erect ears.] *

* [See "Sport in Moray, 1882," p. 39.—Ed.]

February 20th.—Saw a pair of crested cormorants,* at least I consider the birds which I saw to be of this kind. They had the white mark on the hip, and appeared to be different from the cormorants which I usually see here, both in being of a dark colour and of a shorter and heavier shape.

February 21st.—Tracks of three otters in the Burn of Moy. The tracks on the banks are always going up stream, as the otter fishes all the way down, and seldom leaves the water till he has done fishing; when, on returning up the stream to his daily hiding-place, he frequently comes out on the sandy banks, etc.

February 24th.—Rennie brought in a wild swan—weight, 18 lb.; breadth, 7 feet 1 inch. He shot it in a small pool, near which he was waiting for wild ducks yesterday evening. After he had fired at it with duck shot, the bird flew about thirty yards, when one of its wing bones broke close to the body, having been cracked by the shot, and then broke entirely by the weight of the bird. Rennie goes this evening to wait for the otter in Moy Burn. He expects to get a shot as it goes down one of the shallow fords of the stream. Going down the burn towards the sea, the otter fishes all the way, seldom leaving the water; but having eaten all he requires and reached the end of the stream, he then returns up to his hiding-place under some root or tree two or three miles up the water. In going up the otter comes very frequently out of the water, sometimes climbing up the bank and sometimes walking along the beds of shingle and gravel which occur in his way, at all events avoiding all the strong currents, streams, and waterfalls.

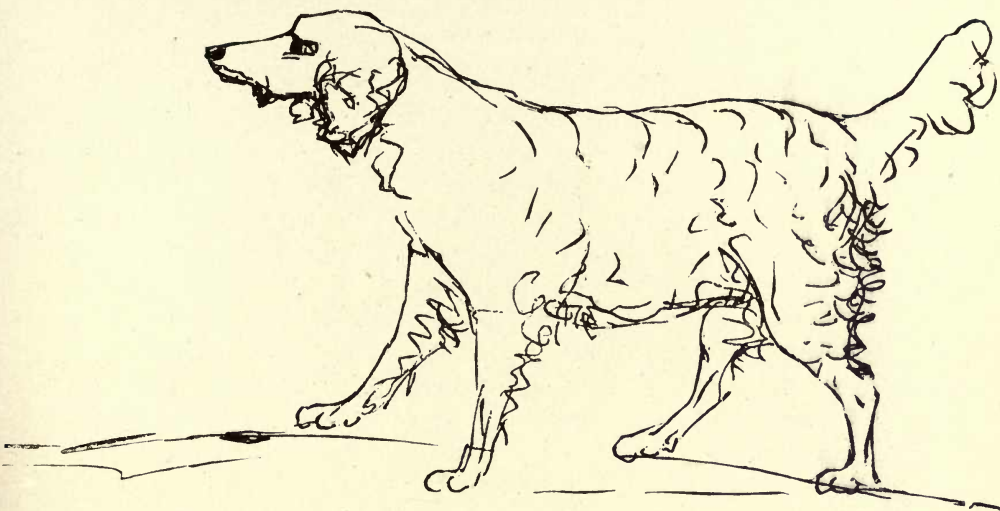
February 26th.—Shot some hares on the Califer, as they are not at all getting worse yet, though we generally find them now being in pairs, that is, within fifty or one hundred yards of each other. Great flocks of peewits about. In skinning the swan I was much struck with the immense quantity of fat being all over his body. The quill feathers are so strong that, although several of them had been struck with No. 1 shot, it had not penetrated through them, but had evidently rebounded, as they would have

* [The shag.—ED.]

done from a stone wall. Wood would have been pierced through with them.

February 27th.—Great numbers of thrushes have appeared about the house for the last two days. I at first thought that they were redwings, from the flocks in which they are seen.





MARCH.

March 1st.—Shot wild ducks on the Loch of Spynie. Although I only killed three mallards, a teal, and a snipe, I was much amused and interested by seeing the immense flocks of wildfowl that were congregated on and about the loch. Mallards, wigeon, teal, pintail ducks, pochards, a few sheldrakes, great numbers of bald coots and waterhens, snipe, sea-gulls, redshanks, and clouds of lapwings and curlews. The teal kept up a constant whistling during the whole day, as did the wigeon. All of the different ducks were pairing, and although on the water they appeared to be in one confused mass, as soon as they rose, I observed that they all flew to and fro in pairs. Even in the great flights as they passed from one end of the loch to the other, every flock was subdivided into pairs, which had a very curious effect in the air. I do not know a prettier sight than a vast number of waterfowl such as I saw to-day filling the water and air above it, and uttering their various cries. The coot's manner of rising is very peculiar—flapping and rushing along the water for twenty yards before he gets well on the wing, making a great noise and sending the water in all directions around him. Once on wing the coot has a great resemblance to

a blackcock in manner of flight, etc. On the water this bird swims very high, giving one the idea of a blackened bladder floating about. The wigeon, on the contrary, swims very flat and low in the water, but on wing is quick and sharp in its movements. The teal has a sudden and rapid, but unsteady flight.

There are a great many marks of otters about the loch at this season of the year. I conclude that they find plenty of flounders and eels in the muddy ditches and canals. The otters about Spynie sit in the rushes on the small islands making seats like those of a hare. Rennie caught a very beautiful pochard duck, which must have received some hurt to prevent its flying, although it was to all appearance uninjured. It is in very perfect plumage, and does not seem at all shy. The eye of this bird is of a very peculiar blood-red colour, and has a very bold and fiery appearance. The pochard is a remarkably heavy bird for its size. Captain C. tells me that they are very good eating. The wigeon are particularly good and free from any fishy or weedy flavour on this loch, owing to their feeding so much on the grass fields near the edge of the loch.

We started several hares which were lying in perfectly wet seats some distance in the rushes. Saw badger tracks about the loch. The keeper catches mallards with snares made of a single fine wire set in the furrows of the fields near the water. He complains that the grey crows kill most of the young waterfowl. These crows are bred on the adjoining property, but he intends to poison them this spring. The rooks have returned to their breeding-places, and were very busy building their nests to-day, carrying up sticks from every direction.

March 2nd.—The pochard which I brought home yesterday alive is still tame, and eats worms fearlessly from the children's hands. They gave him a water trough with a quantity of weeds taken out of the burn, which he appears to be very fond of. A great many wigeon feeding about the island; a large proportion of them seem to be hens, whereas on Spynie the greater proportion seem to be drakes.

March 3rd.—Immense flocks of oyster-catchers on the sand-banks. The pochard, which the boys have in a little yard, is perfectly tame, taking worms from their hands. When it takes a worm from the ground, it generally washes it in the water before swallowing it. Rennie laid wait for the otter again last night at the Moy Burn, but it seems that the animal twice passed him without his getting a shot. The old man is not so quiet (I suspect) as he has been. Fine warm day, though there is a very large quantity of snow on the hills, more than is usual.

I heard the long-tail ducks making a great noise in the bay this afternoon. Their cry sounds more like some musical instrument than the note of a bird. The wood-pigeons feed very much on the newly ploughed fields, apparently picking up the seeds and grains that are exposed by turning up the ground.

March 4th.—Went to hunt for roe in Burgie Woods, but we did not get a shot. The grey crows calling all day in the woods; great numbers of golden-crested wrens and of creepers searching the fir trees through the whole wood for insects. Also numbers of bullfinches. I killed a jacksnipe near the river.

Captain S.'s keeper told me a curious anecdote, which strongly displays the great affection which birds have for their mates. He had set some traps for wild geese near a marsh in Berwickshire, but was prevented looking at them by some unexpected business for two or three days. When he did look at his traps, he found a hen grouse caught in one of them. The bird was not much injured, and the cock bird was close to her, and had brought (to use the keeper's expression) "a hatful" of small tender shoots of heather, and had laid them down all round his mate, seeing that she was unable to move and search for food herself.

I have known a cock pigeon come to feed his hen when she was caught in a horsehair snare, but I had no idea grouse had the same strong attachment to each other. This happened in the month of April, when the grouse would have been paired and preparing to breed.

March 8th.—The male hares have grown so small that they

frequently look scarcely larger than rabbits, whereas the female hares appear to be fatter than at any time of the year.

Great numbers of black-headed gulls both in the fields and on the bay. In the fields they follow every plough that is at work, picking up the worms and grubs that are turned up. Ringed dotterels also are come in flocks.

March 9th.—Went to Lochlee. Saw no swans or geese, but great numbers of mallard, wigeon, and teal, a few golden-eyes and morillons, but was unlucky in getting few shots. I saw tracks of several roe in the moss coming home, but no ducks anywhere, except about the lochs. Saw also two or three jack-snipe. The ground covered with snow by eight o'clock this evening. The hills were white in the middle of the day. (Wind N.E.)

A very fine drake wigeon which I killed to-day was not nearly in full plumage, though a remarkably heavy and large bird.

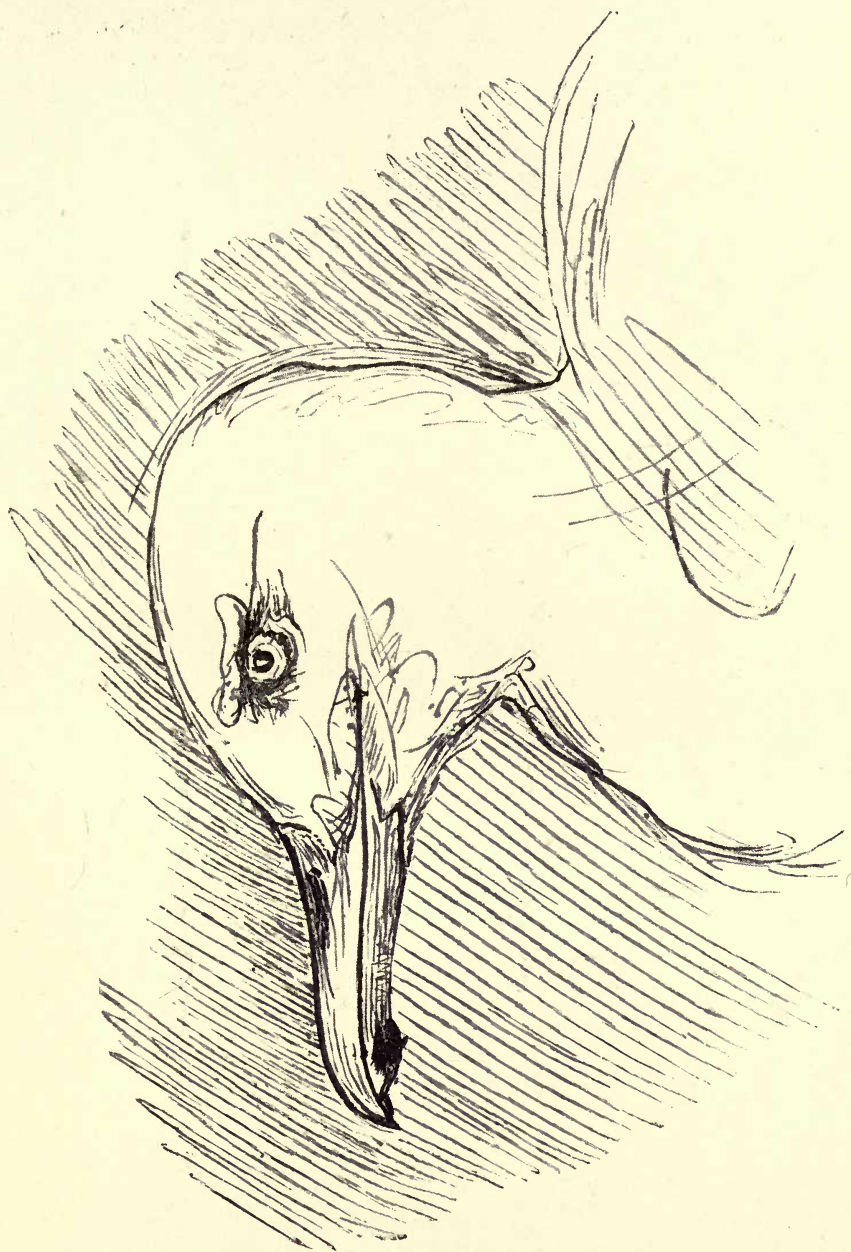
March 10th.—The ground covered with snow, and in the evening a hard frost. Thousands of larks and golden plovers in the fields, and a great many mallards in the open pools about the island.

All the wigeon which I killed this winter have been in very good condition. The black-backed gulls very noisy in the bay.

March 12th.—From Snowie I went beyond Milton Brodie to the Moss of Erneside to look for geese, but saw none. Indeed, there is scarcely an acre of ground in the whole country undisturbed, what with sheep, cattle, men, women, and herd boys, and in all the low country there is not a safe place for a partridge or other bird to build her nest in. Rennie complains loudly of the country being "quite spoilt by drainage and improvements."

March 13th.—Walked to Forres and to the Moy Burn, where there were several otter tracks. As usual all the tracks on the banks were going up the stream, showing that the animal does not leave the water when going down to fish.

March 16th.—I walked to-day across the sandhills as far as the shore. In a kind of loch made by the sea, I saw a great



number of sheldrakes. As the tide left them they began feeding, walking quickly about and poking their bills under the grass and weeds for any small shells or marine insects that they might find. This kind of duck moves about on shore with a very different gait to that of the common mallard. Instead of the waddle of the mallard, the sheldrake walks about with a light active step and erect carriage, more resembling that of the wild goose than any other bird. Altogether the sheldrake is a peculiarly handsome and showy bird, and I have no doubt would with a little trouble be made available in the poultry yard, as they are easily domesticated, although those killed on the sea-shore have a fishy flavour. If fed on the same food as tame ducks, their flesh would soon lose all disagreeable taste. I saw to-day a few of the white-fronted geese pass over my head. The bean goose appears here regularly as soon as the oats are sown.

March 17th.—Walked to-day towards Findhorn. The tide was heavier than I ever remember seeing it. A few wigeon were about the bay, and several mallards. The river in flood from the snow melted by the high south-west wind, which invariably makes the river rise at this season.

March 18th.—The river was so high this morning that the ferryman between this and Moy could not cross, which prevented my going to Lochlee as I had intended doing.

March 19th.—A fine, warm day. Went to Lochlee, where we saw great numbers of mallards, wigeon, and teal, several badger tracks along the tracks in the heather, etc., and along the side of the lochs. Otter tracks along the burn.

March 20th.—Fished in the river and caught a number of sea-trout from 1 lb. to $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. each; some of them in very good condition. A large trout of 4 lb. rose to my fly two or three times without taking, so I put on a small black midge, and he took it immediately, and after some trouble I killed him. The best fly at this season in the Findhorn is a crimson body silver twist black hackle and wigeon or teal wing. The sea-trout here at this season certainly take this fly in preference to any other

that I can find. I saw a badger track near the sea to-day in a place certainly three or four miles from any cover or hole inhabited by these animals. They seem to be great wanderers at this time of year.

March 22nd.—In the evening, waited for ducks near the river. Killed two widgeon; the drake still not in full plumage. Killed some fresh-run sea-trout in the morning. Fish have more instinct than we give them credit for. I saw a trout to-day (about six inches long) that had been left in a small pool by a rise of the river making its way over the dry stones over a ridge that separated the pool it was in from the river, the distance being a full yard. When it saw us, the trout immediately turned itself round and wriggled back into the pool it had come from. This seems so very extraordinary a story that I should be almost afraid of telling it to any person; nevertheless it is true.

The duck's bill is a very curious and perfect piece of "mechanism." The end is full of the most delicate nerves, with which the bird can discover the small worms, etc. that it preys on under the mud. The end of the woodcock and curlew are furnished in the same manner, but apparently not so completely as the duck; whereas the bill of the oyster-catcher is as hard as ivory at the tip, the bird using it more for breaking open shell-fish than for digging in the mud.

R[ennie] tells me that it is a most amusing sight to see an old otter teach her young ones to fish. An old otter (accompanied by a couple of young ones when fishing in a burn or river) on catching a good-sized fish carries it to the bank and gives a loud, shrill kind of cry between a whistle and a blowing noise. The young ones immediately hasten up, tumbling over each other in their eagerness to get to the fish. The quickest takes hold of it, and then they commence tugging and pulling at it like two puppies at a bone. At last the old one interferes and drives away one of the young ones. She then continues her fishing, and generally soon catches some more prey. I see the otter tracks very much about the small pools at the end of the river,

where they appear to hunt for flounders, etc. left by the tide. The tracks that we see are almost invariably going up the river, showing that the animal keeps the course of the stream in her downward course, but on coming up frequently leaves the water to go a few yards along the bank. They often, too, take a short cut overland from one bend of the river to another when returning after their night's fishing.

March 27th.—I saw some large flocks of geese coming into the bay this evening. The number of gulls, sandpipers, peewits, etc. is quite incredible. Fished in the river and caught several sea trout, some fresh run, others lean and bad; also a few yellow trout.

March 28th.—A cold, sleety day, and the fields even about the house covered with snow, and quite white in the evening. (Wind N.E.)

The golden plovers which I now see are becoming black on the breast.

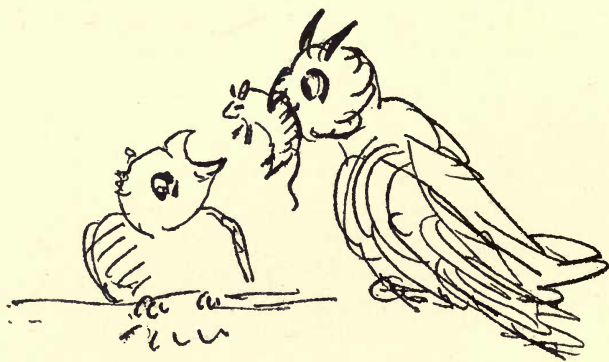
March 29th.—Walked to-day seven or eight miles eastwards in hopes of seeing geese, but found none. Killed some mallards, snipe, etc. Curlews in large flocks in the fields. Much snow on the hills.

March 30th.—Cold, sleet, and snow. The hills as much covered with snow as they have been all the winter. Six swans came into the bay this evening, and near dusk flew westwards towards Lochlee. Some brent geese and great numbers of wigeon and mallard. The latter appear to have been driven down again from the high ground. It is observable that the wigeon in the bay here are seldom in such good and forward plumage as those which I see in the fresh-water lakes, or on the coast of the more exposed parts of the Firth. It is singular where all the grey geese (usually so numerous at this season) are this year.

Rooks have eggs, as I see the shells under their nests of eggs that have been broken.

March 31st.—In the bay to-day—mallard, sheldrake, wigeon, brent geese, cormorant, curlew, oyster-catcher, whimbrel, redshank,

ringed dotterel, and large flights of different sandpipers, etc. I observed a peculiarity in the flight of the oyster-catchers and whimbrels. Large flocks of these birds were constantly alighting on a small island near where I was concealed. The birds invariably flew down wind to sixty or eighty yards to the leeward of the spot on which they intended to pitch, and then turning round flew back against the wind and alighted with their heads to windward. Of the hundreds that were on the island, not one pitched in any other manner. The snow and rough weather seem to have driven all the grey geese southwards again. All the birds perfectly understand the alarm note of the carrion crow, and I often lose a shot by these birds giving notice of the presence of an enemy as they fly overhead.





APRIL.

April 2nd.—Cold, snowy day. Wind N.E. A larger flock of brent geese in the bay.

At this season the salmon and trout appear to lie in the dead water of a pool, or quite at the tail of the stream so as to be out of the strength of the run, not having the same power of resisting the water as they have in the warmer weather. Cold as the water is, however, they take a fly that suits them, though certainly there are no living flies to be had by then.

The field mice shut up the entrances of their holes during the cold weather.

April 4th.—Showers from the west, but no break in the snow on the hills. The water-ouzels have entirely disappeared from the burn near the sea, having probably gone farther up the country to breed.

April 6th.—The boys found some rooks' eggs and peewits'

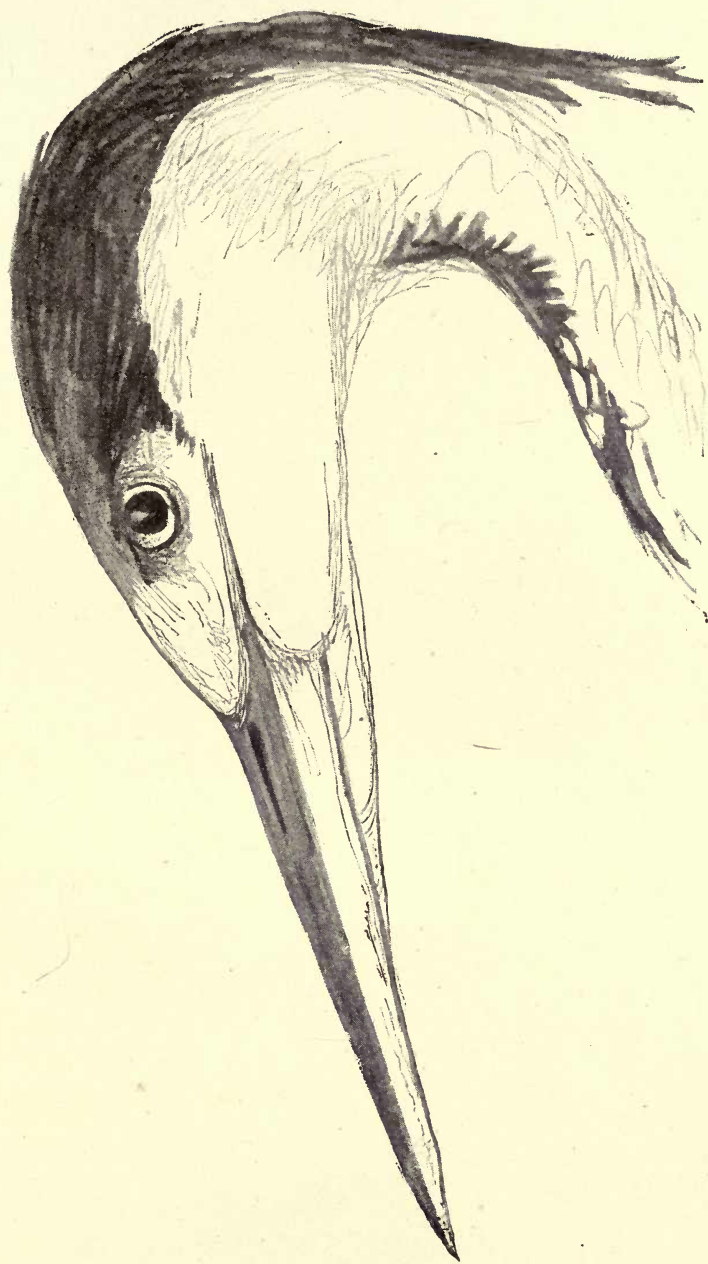
eggs. The latter birds seem to commence several nests before they determine on laying their eggs in anyone, as I frequently see three or four nests begun all near each other, and the peewits are far too quarrelsome to allow of these being nests of different birds built so near to each other. By the time that their four eggs are laid, they generally collect a considerable quantity of straw roots or sticks in their nests, appearing to increase it with every egg that they lay. Some grey geese were seen to-day. We caught a beautiful brent goose in a trap on a grassy island, which is generally covered by the sea at high water.

April 7th.—Aurora borealis very bright in the evening. R[ennie] tells me that he has frequently fancied that he has heard the aurora. He expressed the noise as like the rustling of dry leaves in gusts of wind. From the opportunities had by a man of his pursuits (*i.e.*, watching motionless and noiselessly during the night for otters, etc.), I have no doubt but that he is quite correct, more particularly as I did not lead to the observation by any question or remark of my own.

April 8th.—It blew a hurricane to-day from the W.N.W. with cold showers. We anticipated this kind of weather from the brightness of the aurora last night. Large flocks of brent geese driven into the bay. The birds scarcely able to move from the ground in exposed places. I saw a sea-gull caught by the wind in the air and turned over five or six times entirely before it could recover its balance and get its head to windward.

April 9th.—Walked eastwards to look for geese. Saw none. The rooks' eggs seem to have all been blown out of the nests by the high wind of yesterday. There is a very deep covering of snow on all the hills, much increased since yesterday. (Wind N.W.)

April 12th.—I caught some fine sea trout in good condition in the river, though the water was high and the wind in the east. Some flocks of wigeon still remain. We picked up a few plovers' eggs. They lay principally in the fallow fields, or in the fields where the oats have been lately sown and harrowed in.



April 17th.—To-day being a soft and rainy day, immense numbers of wild geese arrived from southwards, brought northwards by the disappearance of the snow. These birds have arrived much later this year than they usually do, being probably delayed by the long continuance of winter and frost. There are large flocks of the bean goose, known by their dark coloured heads and necks. The large light coloured grey geese remain in small flocks of six to twelve, and are easily distinguished from the other geese by their lighter colour and slower movements. They frequent clover and green wheat fields more than the new sown grain.

The arrival of the geese to-day was worth seeing. An immense body of 300 or 400 birds arrived first in one flock. As soon as they were above the sands, every bird appeared to commence calling, making together a noise that first attracted our attention, though we were nearly a mile from the place. After flying to and fro a short time above the bay, they broke off into different companies, and dispersed through the country looking for feeding-places. We could see the flocks as they wheeled round and round different new sown fields looking for places to alight. All the afternoon fresh flocks came in.

April 18th.—Though the snow is entirely washed away here and on the lower hills, the rain of yesterday must have been snow on Wevis, as it is entirely covered with a new coating. Blackbirds, thrushes, and hedge-sparrows have eggs. I rode up to the heronry to-day.* The number of herons is very much diminished, but the rooks have increased very much. The keeper of Sir W. Cumming, who I saw up there, tells me that he had been climbing to the jackdaws' nests (these birds breed in great numbers in the rocks on the opposite side of the river to the herons). The jackdaws had no eggs of their own yet, but he showed me a whole handful of the shells of herons' eggs which he had found about the nests of the jackdaws, these birds evidently being in the habit of constantly plundering the nests of their neighbours, and of carrying off the eggs to eat

* Heronry now extinct.—See "Sport in Moray, 1882," p. 52.

them at their leisure. There were a great many kestrel hawks flying about the rocks near the river. We saw six or eight at once in several places. Amongst the rooks we saw one that was nearly white.

April 19th.—To-day Rennie and myself killed four grey geese. The strength and watchfulness of these birds in this country, where they are so much harassed, makes them very difficult to kill. Some that we killed were feeding on new sown peas, and others on new sown barley. There seems to be a great number of them just now in the country.

April 20th.—I saw a barn owl sitting on a tree overhanging one of the highest cliffs of the river.

The kestrel hawks are very numerous. We saw one fly into a tree calling loudly, and carrying something, a small bird or mouse, in its beak. Presently another hawk of the same kind came, and the first bird immediately gave its prey up to the last comer, who carried it off. The bird who brought the mouse carried it in its beak, but the one who received it carried it off in its claws.

April 23rd.—I went again to look for wild geese, but though we saw a great number and several large flocks evidently newly arrived, searching over the country for good feeding-places, we could not get a shot. One time when we nearly had succeeded, the flock took alarm at the cries of some rooks who saw us and flew off. I have more than once lost a chance at geese by these birds giving alarm. The flights of geese as they pass over have a very picturesque effect—flying in the shape of a V, with generally a large bird at the head or point of the V, and signalling to each other with an occasional cry. When about to alight they break their rank and collect in a confused mass. When they arrive near their resting-place on the sands, the whole flock frequently dart off in different directions, shooting through the air and performing evolutions that one would scarcely suspect so heavy a bird could accomplish. Beans and peas seem their favourite food.

April 24th.—Wild goose shooting *omnium rerum incertissima*.

After labouring half the day, when the whole flock were all but within shot of us, two large gulls came sailing over our heads, and seeing us, they hovered over us, uttering cries of alarm louder and louder, till the geese took fright and flew off. Another chance I lost to-day from some curlews giving the alarm. However, I killed one fine goose. Kestrel and grey crows' eggs.

April 26th.—Saw two sand-martins to-day; the first of the swallow kind that I have seen this year. I also heard some terns calling in the bay. A great many geese flying to and fro to the new sown fields.

April 29th.—In the fir wood beyond Kinloss we found the nest of the long-eared owl, with one young bird above half-grown, with the brightest yellow eyes, and one rotten egg. The owl had apparently taken possession of an old crow's nest on the top of a fir tree, in rather an open place of the wood. I saw a house swallow to-day.

It is curious how very unlike each other are the eggs of some birds. The grey crow, for instance, whose nest we also found in the same wood with four eggs.

April 30th.—A stormy, wild day. The wind in every quarter. We caught a number of trout. The wild geese appear to have mostly gone away. I saw but very few about the bay to-day. The fieldfares have not yet all gone.





M A Y.

May 1st.—A stormy, thundery day. Swallows as well as martins are becoming tolerably common. The geese generally leave here about the 3rd or 4th May. From the quantity of snow on the hills to the north this season, they should naturally remain longer, but I have seen very few for the last two or three days.

To-day is the first day on which I have seen any quantity of flies on the river, but all the morning the streams were covered with a kind of grey-blue gnat, which the trout were feeding on most greedily.

It is remarkable that the insectivorous birds appear to be the first to have eggs, such as the thrush, blackbird, robin, hedge-sparrow, when the chaffinch, greenfinch, and the different buntings, etc., have not yet commenced laying, although busy building. I shot a brown owl to-night.

May 3rd.—In the woods. Saw the cuckoo for the first time this year. Also crossbills in pairs, siskins, etc. etc.

May 7th.—We heard the land-rail to-day for the first time, being a week after the usual time.

May 8th.—The land-rails begin to be numerous. Swifts as well as the other swallows and martins appear. I also saw several wheatears to-day, and whitethroats.

May 9th.—Rainy mist from the east. Great numbers of martins, etc. The common river flies, such as the stone fly, etc., are very backward in appearing this year. Mallards in flocks, the ducks beginning to set. The oyster-catchers are now in larger flocks than at any other season.

May 10th.—Caught some fine sea trout with small black gnats. I killed some land-rails to-day. The land-rail is a curious mixture of cunning and simplicity, at one time gliding in the most hidden and cunning manner through the grass, so as to appear more like a weasel than a bird, and then standing upright within a few yards of its pursuer, uttering its loud and hard croak. I have seen one standing actually between the legs of a cow croaking as loud as it could, and seeming perfectly to distinguish the cow from its dreaded enemy the dog.

May 12th.—W. Stuart caught a salmon of 22 lb.; a very rare fish in this river, the general size of salmon being from 7 to 10 lb. in the Findhorn. The banks of the river are now very beautiful, the bird-cherry and other flowering shrubs being in full bloom. Corncrakes numerous.

May 17th.—Wind N.E. Cold and wintry. The water very cold. Fly fishing to-day I caught a martin, who dashed at the artificial fly. I do not understand why the oyster-catchers remain in large flocks about the shore, as I should suppose that they must now be laying. Young thrushes and robins have already left the nest. P. Cumming dined here. The mountains have as white a covering of snow as they have had all the winter.

May 18th.—Found a partridge's nest with five eggs in a clover-field. The nest, etc., carefully covered with dry grass.

May 19th.—I find that the large black-backed gull, as well as the smaller kinds, feed on grain whenever they find it in the fields, also on turnip.

May 21st.—Harry caught a grilse to-day of $2\frac{1}{2}$ lb.

May 23rd.—The land-rails already have several eggs, as have the whitethroats and other late-coming birds.

May 25th.—Left Invererne for Nairn.

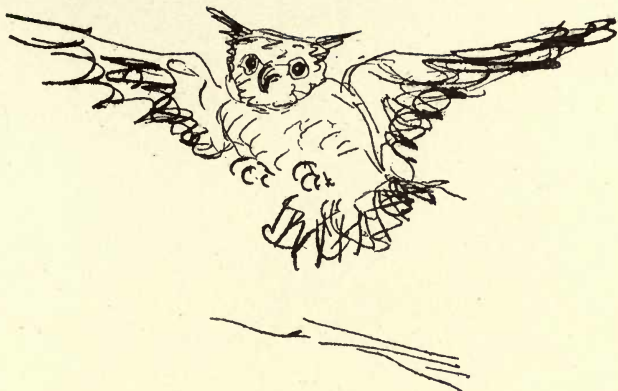
May 26th.—At Nairn to-day the fisherman found a fine

northern diver drowned in the salmon stake nets. It appears that this is not a rare occurrence at this season. The weight appeared at least 16 lb. I saw a black guillemot on the water.

May 28th.—Walked to-day to Lochlee. We saw large nests made by the coots and dabchicks. They pile up a great quantity of rushes in shallow water amongst the weeds, till they have made a strong platform. We saw a large brood of young ducks following their mother.

May 30th.—As the tide begins to ebb, great numbers of terns are seen flying slowly (against the wind) along the water edge, and dropping like a stone into the shallow water. After remaining some moments under the water, they appear again with a sand-eel in the bill. They seem to strike with the most unerring aim, and the little fish has always the mark of the bird's bill just behind the head. I have seen the terns carrying the sand-eels three or four miles inland to their young. Their quickness in catching their prey must be very great, as nothing is quicker or more active in eluding pursuit than the sand-eel. Sometimes (indeed frequently) the terns pursue their prey in deep water several hundred yards from the shore.





N A I R N.

J U N E.

June 1st.—In the woods at Daltra I saw several pairs of crossbills, but could not find any nest, though I have no doubt that they do breed here, from my seeing them at all seasons. I also saw redstarts, siskins, a great many woodcocks, etc. On Loch Belivat we found immense numbers of the black-headed gulls breeding amongst the rushes on the islands, and even upon the branches of some willow trees at the height of several feet from the ground; in fact, wherever could be found anything to support a nest, one was placed. The variety of colour in the eggs was very striking. Every shade of mottled-brown and green. Three is the number which each bird lays. Some had hatched. The young birds are beautifully marked, like tortoiseshell more than anything else. The smell on the islands was quite overpowering from the quantity of accumulated dung, etc. of the birds, sending up an odour like an uncleaned fowl-house. There were a great many mallards on the loch, but no ducks, the latter having either broods of young by this time, or being employed in sitting on eggs. Also a few drake teal were flying about the edges of the water. Coots and all other birds seemed quite banished from the rushes by the confusion and clamour of the gulls. The eggs of the latter are very large in proportion

to the size of the bird. They are as good as plovers' eggs, but more opaque in the white when boiled.

June 5th.—At Lochlee yesterday I see the coots are still building, making the most wonderfully large heaps of rushes, etc. for their nests. I shot a swift walking home. The bird, which was not quite dead, struck its short strong claws through the finger of the boy who picked it up.

June 7th.—Walked to Lochlee to put in a few hooks baited with small trout, in order to see if any fish take them. The people here say that there are no fish in the loch, but as otters are often seen there, I fancy that there must be some kind of fish.

June 8th.—I found on my lines in Lochlee some very large eels of 4 and $3\frac{1}{2}$ lb. weight. We also took some eggs of the bald coot. The nests of these birds, though very large, are more like floating rafts than fixtures. One we found was attached to a floating branch that had fallen into the water, and though from the low state of the water just now the branch and nest were grounded on a shallow, on the least rise of the loch they must have been afloat. We also found a teal's nest with eight eggs in a small tuft of heather standing like an island, just large enough to hold the nest in the midst of a wet place. The heather was high, and the nest and eggs were entirely concealed. If a dog had not frightened the bird off, we should have never found it. Nothing could be more neat and warm than the nest, carefully lined as it was with beautiful down, and arched over with heather and long grass.

June 10th.—Went to Lochlee to put in eel lines. The wind so rough that we had difficulty in doing so properly. A pair of hooded crows near the loch seem to bring eggs of all kinds to a certain spot near the water. I find shells of partridge, wild duck, and many other eggs.

June 11th.—Took up lines at Lochlee. Several eels, but many of the hooks broken from getting into weeds, etc. Crows near Lochlee seem to have fallen on a partridge's nest, as I constantly see fresh shells brought now.

June 15th.—In the pools near the river I see a number of worms, having exactly the appearance of living horse-hair, some light-coloured and others black. There is a common supposition that these worms are nothing but horse-hair come into life from a long immersion in water. What they really are it is difficult to say. To the naked eye, both extremities are alike with neither head nor tail. If kept for some time out of water, they become quite dry and apparently lifeless, but on being put into the water again they immediately (or in a short time) become as lively as ever.*

The small river of Nairn is very high and dirty, and the sea for a considerable distance out very much discoloured with the river water. This arises in a great measure from the fresh water being lighter than the salt, and not mixing immediately, but remaining on the surface. I observe this particularly about the last hour of the flow of the tide, when it begins to be rather slack, as then the river runs strongly outwards, while there is a rapid current in a contrary direction underneath the surface made by the tide running. One sees the lighter sticks, corks, etc. floating rapidly one way, while weed and heavier substances which keep nearer to the bottom keep crossing them in their passage up the river, apparently moving against the stream.

June 16th.—Walked to Lochlee with Freebairn. Found that the hooded crows had taken all the eggs from the teal's nest which we had seen there last week.

June 18th.—Constant rain, but warm days intervening, and an immense growth in fields and gardens.

The eels in Lochlee seem innumerable. They probably have never been disturbed nor killed, excepting by otters or herons, the country people here having a great prejudice against eating or even touching them.

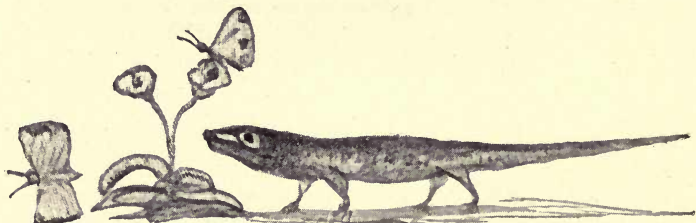
The Nairn came down (like the Findhorn and other mountain streams) in a moment one day this week, rising several feet at once. A flood of this kind carries out all the slimy green weed, etc. that collects in the pools of the river. The sea for some distance out is quite muddy from the river water during a flood.

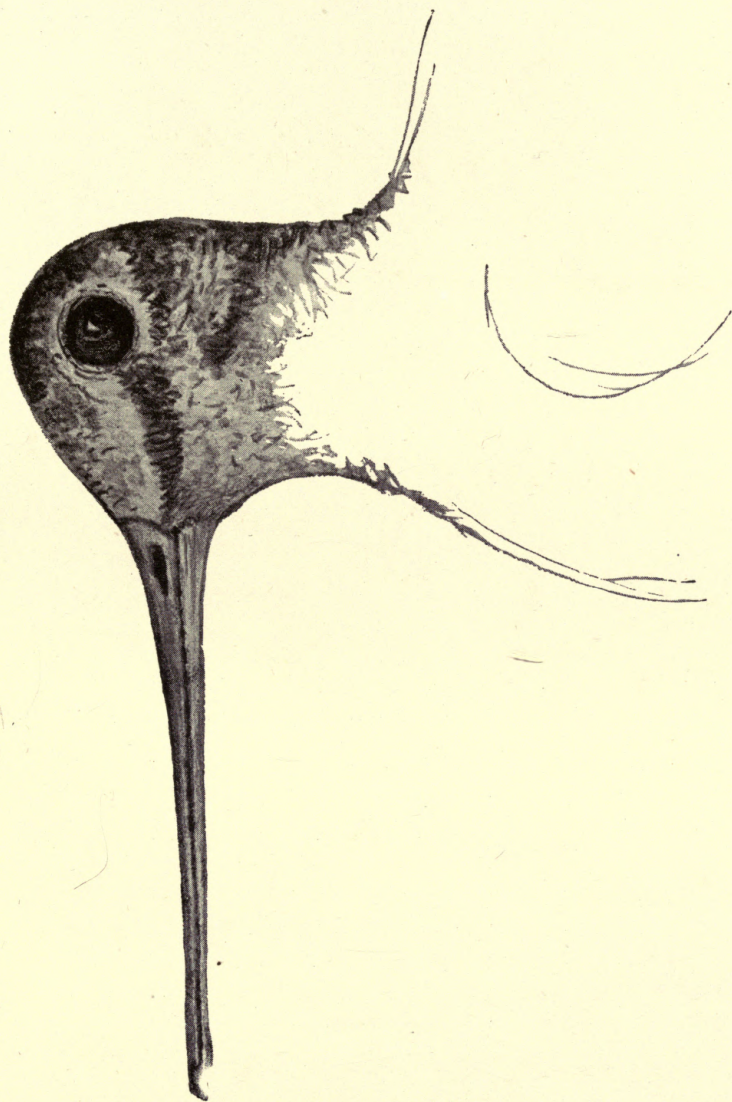
* See "Sport in Moray, 1882," p. 155, footnote.

June 25th.—I rowed to-day to the “old bar” about four or five miles from here. Found some eggs of tern and the lesser tern. Numbers of these birds were flying about, but the eggs are so very similar in colour to the stones amongst which they are laid, that it is not easy to find them. Going there we put out a line for flounders and took it up on returning, catching about fifty flounders, a gurnet, and a large cod. The latter was long and lean as an eel, and had lost one eye. The men took it to bait their crab-traps with, as it was quite unfit for use in any other way. Immense numbers of flounders are left at low water in the pools about the bar.

June 28th.—Went to Cromarty rocks to shoot rock-pigeons, but saw very few. Great numbers of goats playing about on the very edges of precipices. A few gurnets rose at the white-fly, with which we fished going across.

June 29th.—Went to-day with Freebairn to the “old bar” to fish for flounders. We caught a great number, and one small turbot. Found also some terns and ringed dotterels’ eggs. Shot a guillemot on the way. We caught on the lines some gurnets, as well as flounders. The gurnet takes sand-eels better than any other bait. The flounders, when opened, are full of small shell-fish always. The sand-eels are caught in great numbers on the sandbanks, which are left bare by the ebb of the spring tides. The people procure them by turning up the sand to the depth of about three inches.





July 8th.—Went to set lines in Lochlee. Saw there a flock of pochards, several broods of teal and ducks, and tracks of small and large badgers about the wet ground near the loch. I shot a fine roebuck coming home. He had lost one horn, otherwise he would have had a very handsome head.

July 10th.—The young wild ducks are now just ready to fly.

July 12th.—The herring boats all go out to-day. The Nairn boats engage to sell all their fish to fishcurers at Helmsdale, etc., and they therefore remain from home six weeks, putting in at Helmsdale every Saturday night till the following Monday. There are about sixty-five boats belonging to Nairn. Each boat costs, with rigging, nets, etc., about £26. The crew in each consists of five hands. The fishermen have a great prejudice against any boat being manned entirely by one family, in case of any accident happening.

July 16th.—Walked to a wood three miles west of this. Saw some roe and many marks of foxes. Remains of fowls, ducks, etc. about the mouths of the holes. I saw also a woodcock.

August 5th.—I see that the wild ducks have their crops quite full of the seeds of different grasses, etc. A fisherman brought me to-day a most extraordinary fish—length, 3 feet 6 inches; breadth, 6 inches (vertically), and perfectly flat, not horizontally like a flounder, but vertically. Colour—silver-blue, with a beautiful transparent fin of a rose colour running the whole length of its back, and broad fan-like tail, consisting of a transparent rose-coloured membrane. The fish, too, had a peculiar power of elongating its head, which lengthened exactly like a telescope. The oldest fishermen say that they never saw or heard of such a fish before.*

August 18th.—Saw to-day in a wood near Lochlee the marks of where two roebucks had either been fighting or chasing each other round and round a small tree. The ground was beaten in a ring round the tree, as if an animal had been tied to the tree and had been endeavouring to get away.

September 10th.—Mr Dunbar, of Bonar Bridge, had brought

* See "Sport in Moray, 1882," p. 201.

to him to-day a white-tailed eagle—perfectly white—a male bird, and apparently not white from age. I saw several eagles about the high mountains in that country, ptarmigan also, and some deer. The stags' horns this year are by no means remarkable for size. The spring was backward, and they had not good feeding at the season when they were getting their new horns.

September 16th.—Returned home; the weather being too bad for a longer season.

Saw wigeon about Lochlee, the first that I have seen this season.

October 19th.—Large flock of wild geese passing from the north southwards. Also one swan on Lochlee. Last year the first geese that I saw were on the 12th of this month. Harry killed a godwit yesterday and a purre.

I saw a peregrine in chase of a wild duck to-day, the hawk endeavouring to keep under the duck always to prevent her getting to the water. The birds went at a tremendous rate, till I lost sight of them in the distance.

November 1st.—Saw snow-birds to-day for first time. Large flocks of siskins in the woods. The hares seem to have collected very much in the low grounds.

December 7th.—Wild swans on Lochlee, and a greater number of wigeon, etc. than usual. Also a great deal of aurora, all foretelling rough or frosty weather.

December 13th.—Great number of wild ducks, etc. in the loch, but the weather is so fine that they all go to sea as soon as disturbed. The black-cocks wander very much, and when there is no wind, are always found on the tops of the trees.

December 25th.—The weather for some days past has been quiet, but severe frost. Lochlee to-day is entirely frozen over, and the wild ducks, wigeon, etc. are all about the salt water bay at the bar. There are a great many black game, particularly cocks, come down to the lower grounds. Very few woodcocks as yet, and scarcely a snipe to be seen.



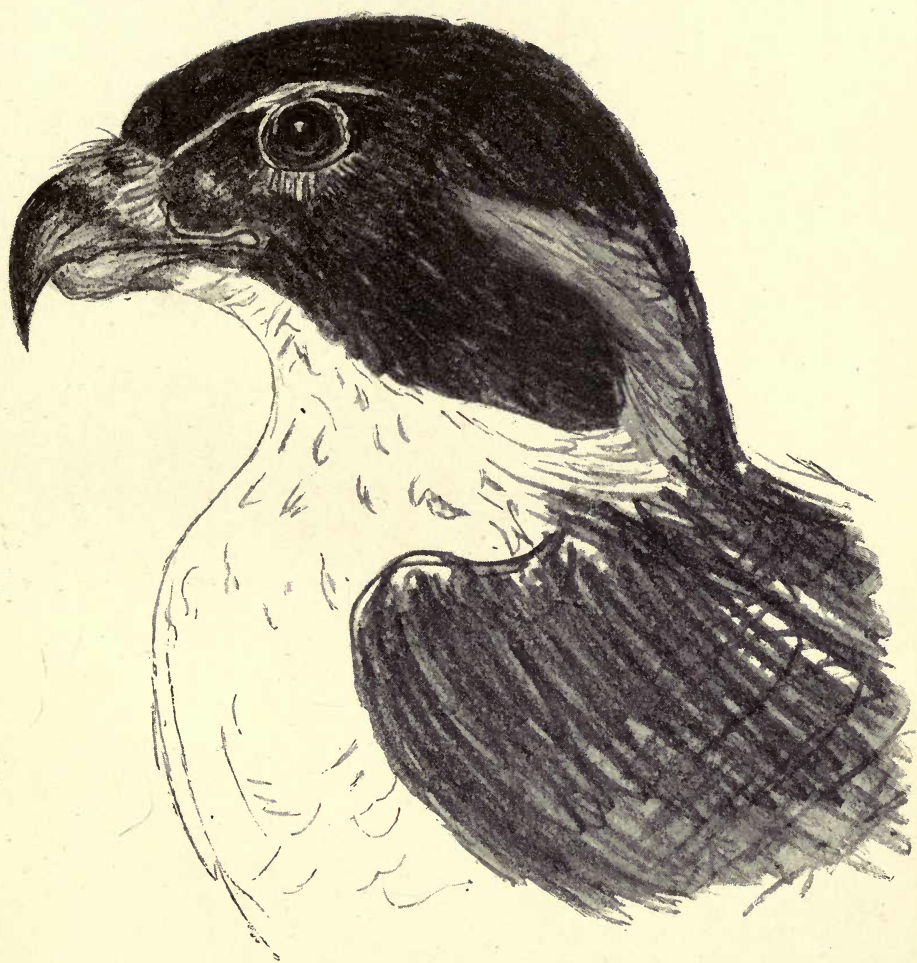


1848.

January 8th.—Thaw in the morning, but severe frost in afternoon. The wood-pigeons (in feeding on turnips) do not dig into the root at all, or even into the heart of the green, but eat off the edges of the leaves, doing really no mischief. The rooks dig great holes into the roots themselves.

February 9th.—When the river is flooded, or much filled with floating ice, the otters here take to the small ditches and springs which remain unfrozen, to look for eels, and hunt up and down these places to great distances from their usual abode.

I often observe that when I kill a single duck out of a flock, after a short time one of the flock (probably the mate of the dead bird) returns to near the place where it last saw the dead



PEREGRINE.

one, and appears to look most anxiously for it. The same thing is observable with swans. If I kill one out of a pair of these birds, the remaining one will not leave the place, but remains hovering about, and returns constantly to the dead body of its mate.

I shot a female pochard to-day (one out of a flock). Presently a drake of the same species leaves the main flock, and returning to the place, hovers and swims about restlessly and eagerly, looking for his companion.

February 11th.—The larks begin to sing now. The corn-buntings, etc. have altered their spring note for some time back. Rennie caught a brent-geese that had probably been wounded somewhere. The bird is in high plumage and health apparently, and becomes very tame, feeding fearlessly close to the children. I have observed the same of this species of goose before.

February 26th.—Thrushes singing for the past week. Great many geese feeding in the mosses on the roots of a coarse red-coloured grass. Larks and fieldfares in great flocks.

March 5th.—Wood-pigeons, thrushes, missel-thrushes, black-birds, peewits, black-headed buntings, etc. etc. have been uttering their spring notes for some days past. The teal collect about the loch, and fly about a great deal, whistling constantly. Five wild swans still frequent the loch, three much smaller than the other two. The latter are companions of the one that I killed last week. The frogs are now spawning in the ditches, and the mallards are in every pool.

March 11th.—The brent-geese now are in very great numbers on the seashore, feeding on the grasses that begin to grow. I have not seen any swans on the lochs for some days.

Bean-geese and white-fronted geese are now constantly seen in small companies.

The badgers seem very much on the move just now, as I see their tracks everywhere, turning up the ground like pigs, both in the woods and in the open grounds, particularly in the turnip fields.

March 22nd.—Dabchicks in some pools. The first which

I have seen. There are a few white-fronted geese feeding in certain places about the loch. The brent-geese are exceedingly numerous on the grassy banks, which are left dry at low water. There are a good number of woodcocks about the woods, probably birds remaining here to breed. The sheldrakes are also coming inland.

April 5th.—Shot a white-fronted goose at Lochlee.

April 13th.—The roebucks have not yet lost the velvet from their horns.

April 19th.—I found a wild duck's nest in a tuft of very high heather near a peat moss, with thirteen eggs, apparently within a week of hatching. I broke one of them to try. The nest placed in a situation where it seemed impossible that the young birds could ever have managed to crawl, and at some little distance from any pools of water. I also found a grey crow's nest with four eggs. The old bird caught my attention by the sneaking and quiet way in which she flew out of a thicket of Scotch firs. I also killed a leveret larger than an old rabbit.

May 3rd.—When fishing near the river I found great numbers of young eels under the gravel, my attention being first called to them by a Skye-terrier, which accompanied me, and who employed himself in turning over the stones and eating the eels which he found under them.

September 8th.—I commonly find the crabs about the rocks near Whitburn with their shells quite soft, having just cast their covering of last year. On some occasions the cast shell is found quite whole, even to the covering of the eyes and horns. On the 10th I found one in this state, the crab having apparently only just finished the operation of extracting herself, as she was living in the crevice of the rock, close to the empty shell. What is remarkable (but invariably the case), the animal immediately on having cast her shell increases considerably in size to a very great degree; in fact, the only time that the crab has to grow in is almost instantaneously on casting, as her skin commences immediately to harden into a new shell, and this done, all increase of size is impossible. Before casting, the flesh of the crab

seems entirely to be turned into a watery substance enclosed in a tough skin, which enables her to draw herself whole out of the shell. Anyone who has seen a crab must know how impossible it would be for the animal to drag its legs and claws through the small joints of these parts, unless the flesh is totally changed in size and substance. Altogether, the power of a crab to cast its shell entire without breaking the covering of a single limb is one of the most extraordinary things in nature.

Almost invariably, a crab, while her shell is soft and helpless, is protected by a male crab, who remains with her, and on the approach of danger, covers her with his body and claws, and dies rather than leave his helpless charge. Take him away and put him at a distance of several yards, but he returns immediately to protect the helpless female. In a few days, however, the skin hardens into shell, and the crab no longer needs protection.

One of the most beautiful and delicate sea-shells found here is the *patella pellucida*. A small thin-shelled limpet that adheres to the broad-leaved tangle, great beds of which grow on the rocks, which are only left uncovered at very low tides. After any heavy swell or storm, it is curious to see how large masses of rock are floated to some distance by the buoyancy of the seaweed attached to them, which appears to act the part of a kind of parachute in the water.

Great numbers of young gulls in their grey plumage are constantly flying to and fro along the shore here now. Also a few mallards, teal, and many kinds of sandpipers. A few days ago, six geese were seen passing along.

Migratory birds, such as wheatears, whitethroats, redstarts, etc. are very numerous near the coast, waiting to depart.

Kestrels and merlins are numerous also. Amongst other birds killed by the boys for their hawk were specimens of the tree-sparrow and rock-lark.

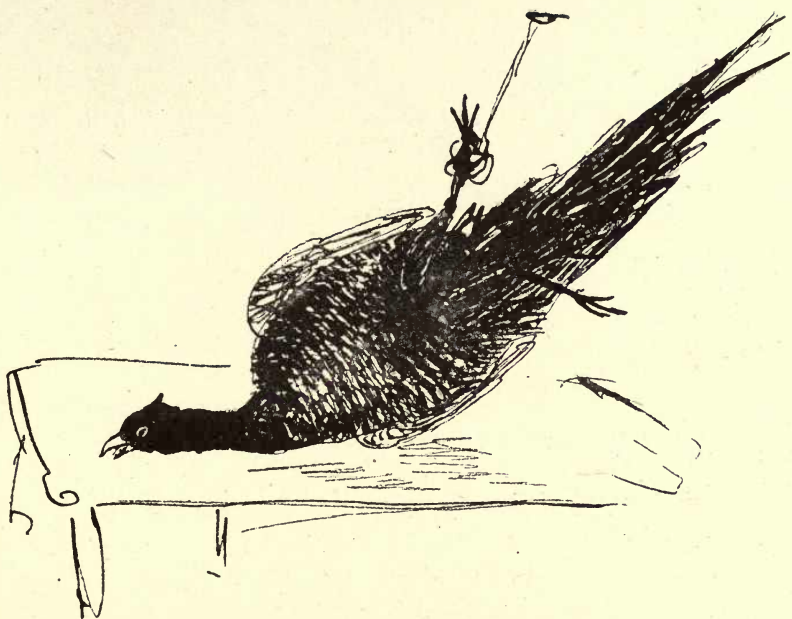
In some spots about the middle of September, the painted lady butterfly tolerably numerous, but seems to be confined to certain patches of ground.

The toad catches insects with extraordinary rapidity. Some

who live in a cask of water in the yard catch the flies when they settle near them. The toad, on seeing a fly, creeps up with great caution till within an inch or two, and then, with a motion so rapid that the eye cannot follow it, the fly is caught and swallowed. Apparently the toad darts out his tongue, but it is impossible to see exactly how the fly is caught. All one sees is a rapid opening and shutting of the toad's mouth, down which the fly (which was an inch or more from it) disappears as if by magic.

The frogs also feed on the flies, but do not catch and swallow them with the same wonderful quickness.





1849.

[*Edinburgh*], *January 3rd*.—In a poulterer's shop here is a fine male capercaillie, which was killed in a wood a few miles south of *Edinburgh*.

Mr Dickson (the gunmaker) tells me that a pure white egret was killed three years ago in *Fifeshire*. Also that a gerfalcon was killed on the *Pentland Hills* after a severe storm a few years ago.

During this very severe weather, our hawks, both the merlin and the *Iceland falcon*, seem to thrive best when left out during the night with no shelter whatever.

January 6th.—Mr Watson (*Forth Street, Edinburgh*) showed me a hybrid between the blackcock and the grouse. This bird had undoubted characteristics of the two species—the head most like that of the grouse; the breast nearly black, with white bars like many grouse; the back with five brown and black stripes, scarcely darker than many grouse which I have killed; the tail larger than that of the grouse, and very slightly forked; the

legs and feet clothed like those of a grouse, but in rather a less degree. The bird, on dissection, proved to be a male. I saw a bird very similar killed in Kirkcudbrightshire this year, which I have no doubt was also a hybrid of the same kind. Hybrids between the black grouse and capercailzie are not uncommon. Those between the black and red grouse are very rare.

In collections of eggs, the errors and wrongly named eggs are endless.

There is most decisive difference between the young herring and the "garvie," both of which fish are caught at the same time in the Firth of Forth. The garvie is a shorter and deeper fish in proportion to its size, and has also a considerably smaller head and mouth than the other fish.

January 16th.—In the Firth I see velvet ducks, eider ducks, scoter, scaup ducks, mallard, wigeon, Gt. divers, B. throated divers (immature), curlews, etc.; immense flights of sandpipers of different kinds, apparently mostly the ash-coloured sandpipers, pitch on the extreme point of breakwater at the end of Leith Pier. Cormorants perch on the lighthouse or tower at the end of the pier.

The squirrels in the country feed mostly on the seed of the Scotch fir, cutting up the cones to get at them.

A fox appears to hunt daily along the shore to west of Granton.

Fine specimens of the grey plover in one of the poulterer's shops.

The quails are so rank and strong-tasted which I buy here as to be quite unfit to eat.

Found in a shop a very peculiar coloured new pheasant of a uniform silver-grey, or French white.

The raccoons almost invariably lose their eyesight in the Zoological Gardens here.

There is a wolf here so tame that he allows strangers to caress him as quietly as a dog, and appears always anxious to be taken notice of and petted.

The black-headed bunting feed indiscriminately on corn and insects. I find in their crops a number of small beetles, and also oats.

The rooks in Edinburgh build in nearly every square and garden in great numbers. They break the twigs off the trees to build with. Some of the trees are nearly destroyed by them, all the small twigs being broken off. During the building season (March) the rooks are very tame in Edinburgh, walking about the streets close to the passers-by, and coming into the little yards and gardens to carry off any stick that may be lying about. They also walk about the streets in search of bits of hay, straw, etc. to line their nests with.

In severe frost and snow, the Highlanders, who are liable to much exposure, loosen every strap and bandage that can at all impede the circulation of their blood, to escape being frost-bitten. They even take off their garters. Nevertheless, Professor Syme says that he has eleven or twelve frost-bitten patients every season.





ELGIN.

1851-2.

December 23rd, 1851.—The thrushes and missel-thrushes have been singing ever since the beginning of the month.

Badgers do not remain so much in their holes during cold weather as people suppose. I frequently find their tracks in the snow. Not a wounded duck appears to escape them (and the foxes) about Spynie.

I see several peregrines about, both old and young birds.

January 7th, 1852.—The woods at Loch-na-bo full of tom-tits of three kinds, golden-crested wrens, crossbills, etc. Saw a peregrine, a hen-harrier, a sparrow-hawk, and a merlin pass the road near us within a few hundred yards of each other.

February 3rd.—Went to the Loch of Spynie in the afternoon. A great many ducks of all kinds, and also large flocks of peewits. The first time that I have seen them this spring I shot a gull (im-

mature herring) with its crop, etc. quite full of turnip. I never before knew that any gulls eat these plants. Very cold wind, W.

February 8th.—The birds (thrushes and chaffinches) sing very much now in the garden. The large-headed field-mice, which are very destructive to many plants, such as pinks, carnations, cabbage plants, stocks, French beans, young sweet peas, etc., do not seem to come out of their holes in the walls much in wet weather. These mice also peel the ash branches, the young pink thorns, etc. which grow on the old walls. The best bait for them seems to be pieces of apple, as they appear to be quite vegetable eaters.

February 14th.—A water-ouzel in the Lossie was singing this morning, and chasing another bird of the same kind, apparently a female, not being so black as the one that was singing. They frequently both dropped into the water, and dived for a short time. The song is very musical and pleasing, though short.

February 24th.—Fine. Great numbers of duck, wigeon, teal, and one goose (I think a white-fronted goose) in the swamp at Lochinvar.

I heard the wood-pigeon coo for the first time this year to-day.

March 23rd.—Warm and gentle rain. I see a wren building in the garden. Several pairs of wood-pigeons close to the house.

April 7th.—I see the eels beginning to show in the dead pools up the river.

A hawk to-day attacked the birds in the cages which were outside the window, killing two birds and tearing the wing off a poor bullfinch, so that we were obliged to kill it.

April 10th.—A water-ouzel's nest in the burn has two eggs. It was built in a broken bank.

The bats fly about now round the buildings and garden. Geese have been seen about for some days, but do not seem to feed near this.

April 13th.—C. took the water-ouzel's nest—an immense building for the size of the bird, the whole being fully as large as a pail, made of moss outwardly and lined with dry grass, etc.

April 19th.—I see in the rapid gravelly streams of the burn a great many lampreys (five inches in length), collected in groups of six or eight, and apparently very busily employed in carrying about small stones about the size of a sweet pea.

The river and burn are smaller than I ever saw them, owing to the long continued want of rain.

April 25th.—Bright and clear, but cold east wind. The little willow wren is now in the garden. Great want of rain. The farmers complain of their grass being entirely burnt up.

April 27th.—Peewits are hatched.

April 28th.—Young blackbirds and robins flying. Warm rain for an hour.

April 29th.—I saw a large flock of fieldfares to-day. They are very late. I shot one that there might be no mistake.

In Spynie I found one egg of the black-headed gull. They have built plenty of nests, but have not laid any eggs yet.

April 30th.—In the evening we went to the Wood of Pluscarden. The badgers were making a great noise late in the evening, apparently frightened.

Vast numbers of wood-pigeons breed in the woods, but I think that very few eggs are hatched owing to the crows taking them.

May 5th.—I looked for the nest of the peregrine to-day, and found that it is placed not, as usual, on a ledge of rock, but quite within a small hole in a place apparently more suited for a jackdaw to build in. Below the nest at the foot of the cliff we found a drake teal partly eaten, but quite fresh. The falcon must have carried it about three miles.

In the woods the badgers and foxes make a great noise now at night, barking, howling, etc.

On the 2nd the black-headed gulls have their nests in Spynie, principally with only one egg, few with three, their whole number.

May 10th.—We heard the land-rail, and saw swifts and flycatchers for the first time. We took a nest of shovellers' eggs (10) in Spynie. Also a good many black-headed gulls' eggs. I saw several wild ducks' nests, and also a brood or two of young

coots, which had just left the nest. Snipes' eggs and redshanks' also in Spynie.

May 11th.—Fished with Mr Allen, and caught a clean salmon with a par.

We heard a bird singing in the garden whose note was new. On watching we found that it was a blackcap, a very rare bird so far to the north.

May 29th.—Birds in the garden now are very numerous, particularly for a spot of ground so nearly in a town—

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|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Wood-pigeon. | 8. Willow-wren. | 14. Tree-sparrow. |
| 2. Cuckoo. | 9. Whitethroat. | 15. Greenfinch. |
| 3. Missel-thrush. | 10. Hedge-sparrow. | 16. Chaffinch. |
| 4. Thrush. | 11. Long-tailed | 17. Yellow-hammer. |
| 5. Blackbird. | tomtit. | 18. Spotted fly- |
| 6. Robin. | 12. Little B. tomtit. | catcher. |
| 7. Wren. | 13. Sparrow. | |

Besides constant visitors, such as hooded-crow, jackdaw, siskin, sparrow-hawk and other hawks, larger titmouse, cole titmouse, etc. etc., sixteen varieties breed constantly, besides the swallows, martins, swifts, about the house.

There is scarcely a day now on which we could procure specimens of these birds within twenty yards of the house, and, as I said, the eggs of sixteen of them within the garden. I might also mention golden-crested wren, bullfinch, etc., which are frequently in the garden.

June 1st.—During a heavy shower of rain, I saw eight young but fully fledged wrens go into a wren's nest, which was scarcely finished, but built by some other old wrens.

June 5th.—We went to-day to take the young peregrines on the rocks, near Hopeman.* By letting a boy over with a rope, we took four young birds nearly as large as the old ones, but covered with white down. After coming home we fed them on a rabbit.

July 2nd.—There is a blackcap in the garden (a rare visitor here), who sings most indefatigably from three in the morning

* [See "Sport in Moray, 1882," p. 114.—Ed.]

till ten at night. It was some time before I could get a sight of the bird, as he sings always in the thickest part of the foliage.

July 26th.—In Pluscarden Wood I found a woodcock's nest with three eggs at the foot of a tree. The forester told me that he had flushed the old bird off it seven days back. She appeared not to have returned. About 200 yards from the place I shot an old woodcock, with a young one rather larger than a snipe. They were in a dry high part of the wood, far from any marshy or wet ground.

July 27th.—My retriever brought to me while looking for ducks in Spynie a water-rail about two or three days old, the old one following the dog and uttering cries of alarm and anger. He also caught and brought an old coot with its quill feathers all out, so that it could not fly. The dog always kills an old coot, though he does not hurt a wild duck in the least. I suppose that the reason is that the coot scratches him severely with her sharp claws.

August 23rd.—Immense numbers of wild ducks come now to feed on the standing barley. Swallows and martins collect in large flocks.

September 19th.—Went to Tain.

September 24th.—In woods near Tain saw a great many crossbills.

A large stag was going about amongst the other deer, occasionally roaring, though not regularly yet. They were, however, rolling in the pools every night.

September 30th.—Very wild day. Eight swans arrived at Spynie. I saw that one had been wounded from a mark of blood on his wing, but he did not seem much hurt. They were all pure white.

October 23rd.—This season seems remarkable for a great abundance of two different things—wood-pigeons and acorns. The former do not feed much on acorns in this country.

I scarcely remember sitting down to eat my luncheon in any wood in this country when shooting or fishing without a robin appearing close to me, who watches my proceedings, and the

moment I move away, begins picking up the crumbs which I fling down for him. Wrens, too, are everywhere in the woods, the fields, and on the heather.

November 18th.—I saw to-day a white wood-pigeon on the same farm near Elgin where I saw one several times two years ago.

November 28th.—I find the crops of the wood-pigeons full of the seed of the dock, although there is a great extent of newly sown wheat in every direction.

December 1st.—The wood-pigeon which I kill have in their crops turnip leaves, the seed of ragweed, docks, a little wheat, and a number of small potatoes as large as marbles, or larger.

December 7th.—Both yesterday and to-day it happened that I wounded a partridge not far from the quarry wood, and on both occasions a peregrine falcon struck the bird in the air and carried it away before my eyes.

December 17th.—Cold day. I saw a white wood-pigeon to-day near Pitgaveny.





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January 1st.—Cold wind, but fine. On the hill at Pluscarden we heard several rumbling noises like (what I should imagine) the sound of an earthquake.

The thrushes sing every morning in the garden.

February 11th.—Returned home from London. Very deep snow.

February 15th.—Deep snow. The river is so closed up with ice and snow that the wild ducks can only settle in a few places. Larks have quite disappeared.

February 17th.—The ground still covered with deep snow and frost.

February 18th.—Still frost and snow. I never remember so severe and lasting a snowstorm in this part of the country. The

wild ducks are nearly all driven away from Spynie, and only a number of unhappy looking coots remain.

February 22nd.—Deep snow, but beginning to thaw.

Thrushes and blackbirds singing in the morning.

February 25th.—Still snow on the ground. Thaw part of the day, but freezing towards evening. The wood-pigeons, notwithstanding, keep in good order filling their crops with turnip leaves, never having any of the roots in them, or even of the rib of the leaf. The water-ouzes sing a great deal in the burn.

Badgers seem to walk about to considerable distances in the snow looking for food. Near the burn the tracks of otters dragging themselves along the snow and rolling like a dog.

March 11th.—Very fine. Two swans at the Loch of Spynie, and a great many ducks of all kinds. Redshanks and black-headed gulls have come in great numbers.

March 13th.—Fine. A great many teal, etc. in Spynie, and two swans, apparently Bewick swans, judging from their comparatively short necks and round bodies, which distinguish them from the hooper.

March 16th.—Ground covered with snow. In some of the fields were great numbers of large round lumps of snow from the size of a man's head to much larger, having the appearance of snowballs rolled by boys, but unlike anything naturally formed that I ever saw before. I could only attribute them to the extreme dryness of the snow allowing itself to be drifted in this manner. The ground had the appearance of being covered with white boulders.

Eight swans at the Loch. Dr Manson sends word to me that a fox has been killing some of his lambs, a very unusual thing for a lowland fox to do.

March 19th.—Larks in great flocks.

March 20th.—Still frost and snow on the ground. The wood-pigeons begin to coo a great deal in the woods. Dozens of them cooing at once.

The roebuck, whose horns are now soft, lie out on the open

hill a great deal, probably not liking to knock their horns against the thick plantations.

March 24th.—Showers of snow daily, and hard frost at night. The snipes call a great deal, and the redshanks.

March 25th.—Hard frost in the morning, but warmer during the day. Very cold again at night. The sparrows have been building for some days. The tree-sparrows appear again. They seem to go away in the winter.

March 29th.—Fine. Slight frost in the morning. The tortoise-shell butterfly was flying about to-day. Snipes call in all the marshes. Many of the coots have left the larger lochs for their breeding-places, in small pools, marshes, etc. There appear to be a great many woodcocks in the woods.

March 30th.—A white hare has been seen for two or three days about the Castle of Spynie.

Rennie sent me a wild swan killed at Lochlee, weight $22\frac{1}{2}$ lb., pure white.

March 31st.—Cold wind, E.

April 2nd.—Rain, but warm. We killed the fox which had been destroying Dr Manson's lambs.

Rennie brought me a roundish white egg with a smooth shell, which he found in a rabbit's hole—length, $1\frac{7}{8}$ of an inch; breadth, $1\frac{4}{8}$ of an inch, apparently the egg of the tawny owl.

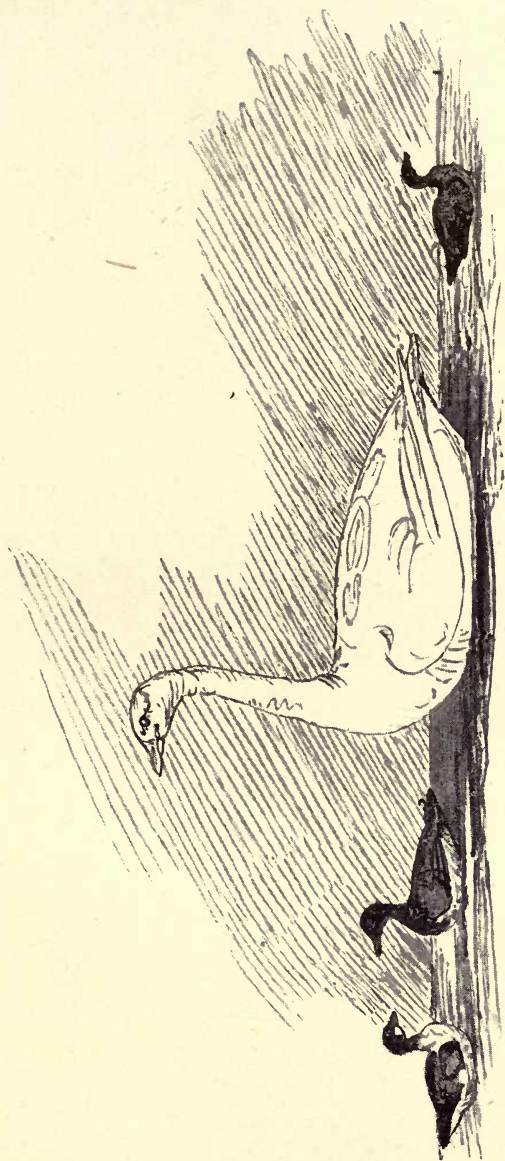
April 6th.—Peewits have commenced laying about Spynie. Along the edges of every pool and ditch near Spynie I see the remains of toads which have been killed and partly eaten. In every instance only the hind legs are eaten. I suppose it is the hooded crow.

While looking for a shot drake, "Leo" (my retriever) suddenly fell down dead without a moment's illness of any kind, as he was apparently perfectly well to the last instant.

Very few ducks in Spynie.

Dr Manson's greyhounds killed two white hares near his house yesterday. A very unusual occurrence to see these animals so far from their accustomed places.

Found that the dog was poisoned by strychnine.



April 7th.—A pair of wood-pigeons looking for a resting-place in the garden.

April 10th.—As yet I have not seen a single spring bird of passage, such as the wheatear, etc., which I generally see a week before this. Every bird is late this year. On the 19th of April in a former season I had found a wild duck's nest with thirteen eggs, apparently within a week of hatching. This season I do not think that they have eggs yet.

April 15th.—Soft west wind. Fished to Lossiemouth and caught a few white trout.

April 16th.—On Monaghty Hill killed a mountain hare. I found a wild duck's nest with eleven eggs. The old bird sitting.

A sparrow-hawk took a hen blackbird off her nest in the garden to-day.

April 24th.—Wild duck in the garden beginning to sit.

April 26th.—I found the peregrine's nest at Hopeman in exactly the same hole that she used last year. I saw three sand-martins to-day.

May 5th.—Gulls have great numbers of eggs in Spynie. Many of the nests have their full number and are sitting.

The sedge-warblers are in the reeds, etc. about the loch.

Young wild ducks hatched on the 3rd.

May 9th.—At Spynie saw swifts and heard the cuckoo, both for the first time this year. I heard the sedge-warblers in the reeds. The gulls (black-headed) are more numerous than ever. Very few ducks appear to have nests. Three pairs of shovellers (at least) flying about. Cold wind and sleet.

Sedge-warblers singing.

May 10th.—The herring-gulls have eggs.

May 11th.—The common white butterfly flying about.

May 17th.—Found a merlin's nest with three eggs. The old birds appear to watch near it by turns to keep off the hooded crows from their eggs till they begin to sit.

C. found the shoveller's nest (eleven eggs) at Spynie.

We went to the rocks near Covesea to look for peregrines' nests. For some time the old birds did not show, and although

I fired off near the place at a bluerock-pigeon, the female falcon did not leave her nest; but while I was there a peregrine (a male), which I at once knew to be a stranger, as he was a last year's bird and still quite brown, came in, apparently from Ross-shire. The male peregrine belonging to Covesea immediately appeared and attacked him; and while they were fighting the female came off her nest, and the two Covesea falcons drove the stranger apparently back to Ross-shire, as we saw them going towards that coast till lost in the distance. Presently the two Covesea birds returned alone.

Snowie sent Mr Hancock the skin of a fresh killed female golden eagle—width, 6 ft. 10 in.; also two eggs of the golden eagle.

May 18th.—I shot an old female badger early in the morning, as she was returning to her hole. She looked as if with young, but on dissecting her we found that she was completely gorged with young rooks, probably picked up under a rookery.

In Quarry Wood we saw the siskins feeding their young which had already flown.

May 19th.—Rennie brought home another owl's egg from a rabbit hole in the wood behind Woodside. The last which he brought was on April 2nd.

May 31st.—We took the four young peregrines out of the rock at Covesea. They were about the right size for taking. The place was full of the remains of pigeons, peewits, ringed dotterel, and redshanks.

On a paling near Gordonstown I found a number of chrysalis, about an inch long, enclosed in a kind of transparent yellow case, which were quite new to me.

June 13th.—A woman brought to me yesterday a young live roe. She calls it three weeks old, but it does not appear quite as old as she says. It drinks milk very readily.

June 15th.—I found a woodcock's nest with four eggs. The old bird flew off and fluttered along the ground to take off our attention. The nest was made of moss, small sticks, etc., and placed under some cut branches.

August 9th.—In the woods near Loch Rannoch I saw a great many siskins, crossbills, redpolls, etc.

Near Carr Bridge, on the Spey, I saw a squirrel in a small clump of alder bushes.

At Rannoch Lodge there is a wild swan which was winged two or three years ago, and now comes to the house to be fed, as tame as any of the tame swans.

At Inverness I saw with a bird stuffer a specimen of the rose-coloured starling, just killed.



